

Mehdi Hasan: Welcome to Deconstructed. I'm Mehdi Hasan.

This week who better to speak with about a combination of domestic and international crises, from violence in Syria to the Democratic presidential race in the U.S., than the legendary writer, activist, and political theorist, Noam Chomsky. Wanna know what he makes of impeachment too?

NC: I mean, Trump is impeachable 100 times over. He's a major crook. Is it politically wise? I frankly doubt it.

MH: Today, in a special episode of Deconstructed, I speak to the one, the only, Noam Chomsky.

My guest today has been a scathing critic of U.S. presidents, and especially U.S. foreign policy, for more than 50 years. He rose to prominence as an outspoken opponent of the Vietnam war and was even included on Richard Nixon's Enemies List. An academic, activist and best-selling author, he's been described as "the founding father of linguistic philosophy," but he's best known today as the intellectual hero to anti-capitalists, anti-imperialists, socialists and anarchists.

I'm talking of course about Noam Chomsky, who is often referred to as one of the 10 most quoted sources in the humanities, along with Shakespeare and the Bible, and yet you rarely if ever, see him quoted, published or invited onto the mainstream media, whether it's the New York Times op-ed page or CNN primetime.

Chomsky, the arch-anti-interventionist surprised a lot of people last year on my colleague Jeremy Seahill's Intercepted podcast, when he said that the U.S. should maintain a troop presence in Syria in order to deter Turkish aggression against the Kurds. Does he still feel that way today, in the wake of President Trump's controversial withdrawal of U.S. troops? And what's his view on impeaching Trump and on the presidential prospects of his old friend Senator Bernie Sanders?

Recently — and I should add shortly before Donald Trump announced the death of ISIS leader Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi — Noam Chomsky joined me for an interview from his new academic base at the University of Arizona, where, aged 90, he's now laureate professor in the Department of Linguistics and chair of an environment and social justice program.

[Music interlude.]

MH: Professor Chomsky, thanks for joining me on Deconstructed.

Noam Chomsky: Very pleased to be with you.

MH: In recent weeks, we've seen some pretty gruesome images coming out of northeastern Syria, rebel groups backed by Turkey on the offensive killing and mutilating, not just Kurdish fighters from the SDF, the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, but women and children too.

Announcer [translated from Arabic]: This house you see here, there were children playing. A motor fell and killed a boy. The girl she lost her leg.

MH: Am I right in saying that you didn't support President Trump's decision to withdraw U.S. troops from the front lines in Syria?

NC: That's correct. For a long time, I've been trying to organize support for opposition to the withdrawal.

MH: And why is that?

NC: Because the, from the left at least, the call for withdrawal was based on anti-imperialist principles. But principles have to be understood in connection with the human reality of the existing circumstances. A small, U.S. contingent with the sole mission of deterring a planned Turkish invasion, which was obvious, is not imperialism. It's protecting the Kurds from an expansion of the atrocities and massacres that Erdogan has been carrying out both within Turkey itself and in the areas of Syria that he's already conquered.

MH: And a lot of people listening especially on the left might be surprised to hear you say this. They might say Noam Chomsky, we associate him with anti-interventionism, with opposition to U.S. foreign policy, and U.S. military interventions abroad. Why are the Kurds the exception to that, you know, life-long, career-long opposition to U.S. military interventions, especially in the Middle East?

NC: If you take a look at what's happening, it's not intervention. Syria was already invaded by Turkey. The troops that are there were essentially doing nothing except deterring an expansion of a further invasion. You have to not deal with slogans as if it's a religious catechism. You have to ask how they apply in particular to complex human circumstances.

MH: I take your point. But I do want to explore this a bit more broadly because I've agreed with a lot of what you've written over the years in terms of U.S. foreign policy in Afghanistan, in Iraq, in Latin America. And as you know, and you've written so eloquently on, a lot of these interventions, invasions, bombing campaigns, regime changes, are justified on humanitarian grounds, with leaders saying what you're saying that we should protect civilians. A liberal interventionist listening to you speaking now might say, "Well, why didn't Noam Chomsky support the Kosovo intervention to protect Albanians? Why didn't he support a no fly zone for Syrian Arabs in Idlib or Aleppo who were being bombed by Assad? Why only the Kurds?"

NC: Let's take your first example, Kosovo. I opposed the NATO bombing because it was known both to the Clinton administration and to the press, which refused to report it, that the bombing would radically increase the level of crimes and atrocities against the people in Kosovo. General Wesley Clark informed the Clinton administration weeks earlier that that's exactly what would happen. He informed the press when the invasion began that that's what was gonna happen. The reason I opposed it was because there were diplomatic options available. And instead, NATO, meaning the U.S., chose to undertake a major military attack consciously knowing that it would greatly increase atrocities as the Serbs couldn't react by bombing Washington. So they'd react on the ground.

You have to ask yourself, in each circumstance, what are the consequences of your decisions? If you don't do that, you're not a moral human being. Now you're perfectly right that every monster you can think of in history has declared that whatever acts they're going to carry out are for humanitarian reasons. Now, if you have a brain functioning, what you do is ask is this

correct? Or isn't it correct? You don't say, because Hitler said it was a humanitarian intervention in the Sudetenland therefore, there are no humanitarian interventions.

MH: No, of course, but in Syria, for example, as you know, very complicated conflict with people, you know, people of good faith and bad faith on many sides. There are a lot of Syrian Arabs who would say, why didn't Noam Chomsky ask for U.S. troops to protect us when we were being butchered by Assad? Why only for the Kurds when they're being butchered by Erdogan?

NC: Because there was no way for a small contingent of U.S. troops to deter Assad. What in fact was done was that under Obama when they were still planning to overthrow the regime, the CIA was providing heavy weapons to the rebels who were by then mostly jihadi rebels.

Newscaster: There's word tonight that the CIA has been delivering weapons to rebels in Syria over the last two weeks. According to the Washington Post, the Obama administration is sending vehicles and other equipment to boost the muscle of rebel fighters in Syria's two-year civil war.

NC: They in fact, slowed down Assad's advance, but quite predictably, they brought the Russians in to escalate the conflict.

Newscaster: There's growing concern among top officials in the Defense Department over Russia's growing involvement in Syria's civil war. It's escalating by the day and so are the risks of a confrontation with the U.S.

NC: So yes, you have to ask yourself, what are the likely predictable consequences in every situation? You can't find formulas in human affairs that will determine the action in every particular case.

MH: And just on Iran, because as you well know, a lot of U.S. politicians, especially on the right, they want American troops in Syria, partly to "deter Iran."

Mitt Romney: At a time when we're applying maximum pressure on Iran by giving them a stronger hand in Syria, we've actually weakened that pressure.

Lindsey Graham: President Trump, if you remove all of our forces from Syria, you're throwing the Kurds over. ISIS will come back on your watch and Iran will take over.

MH: How worried are you about a U.S. attack on Iran next year? Because it's election year and with Trump behind in the polls, I for one can see the appeal for Trump of launching a new war in the Middle East in the run up to November?

NC: Well, first of all, let's separate those two issues. A small contingent of troops to deter Turkish aggression would have nothing to do with Iran. So we put that aside, what are the prospects for a war against Iran? It's hard to say. I don't think the Trump administration could answer. I don't think they want a war. A war could have extremely harsh effects not only out of Iran, but much more generally. So for example, Saudi Arabia's major oil production, almost all the oil production is in the northeast corner right in the Shiite areas, very close to Iran. They have missile capacities. They could devastate one of the main oil producers in the world.

There could be many other consequences. So I don't think the United States wants a war with Iran. What they want to do is torture Iranians as much as possible in the hope that destruction of the economy will lead to some breakdown inside Iran. But that can easily get out of hand. Any accidental incidents in the Gulf, could blow up suddenly and could lead to an attack.

Newscaster: Tensions on the rise in the Persian Gulf once again. The United States says Iran is behind attacks on oil tankers in the Gulf. Now, lawmakers say the Trump administration says it already has the legal authority to begin a war with Iran.

NC: It wouldn't really be an invasion. The U.S. is not going to invade Iran. That's much too costly. It would be an attack from a safe distance.

MH: And of course, as you say, that could escalate as well. No one knows what the unintended consequences of such dangerous action could be. I want to talk about the Donald Trump presidency especially with impeachment on the cards. But before I do, does the seemingly global rise of the far right, of authoritarianism, and nativism from Putin to Orban to Duterte to Narendra Modi in India, how much does that worry you? And what do you think is driving it at this moment in human history?

NC: Of course, it's worrisome. It's very hard to detect geo-strategic planning in the chaos of the Trump administration, which is highly personalized, and so, yeah, megalomaniac, and so on. But you can kind of detect something.

MH: Yeah.

NC: The effort which is overt in Steve Bannon's case to construct a kind of a reactionary international which will consist in the Middle East of the most reactionary states in the region, Saudi Arabia.

Donald J. Trump: The Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, a friend of mine. You've done really spectacular job.

NC: United Arab Emirates, Egypt under the Sisi dictatorship.

DJT: Egypt has a great leader. He's highly respected. He's brought order.

NC: Israel, which is now far to the right.

DJT: Netanyahu, a very special man. He's done a great job.

NC: To be kind of a base for U.S. power in the region. And that extends beyond to try to bring Modi's India into it.

DJT: Prime Minister Modi is doing a truly exceptional job for India.

NC: Orban is another case. Salvini in Italy, Farage if he emerges in the post-Brexit period. Bolsonaro in Brazil.

MH: But is there a particular social or economic or political driver of all this that links all this together?

NC: Sure, yeah, it's very simple and straightforward. Forty years of the neoliberal assault on the general population which has been extremely harmful almost everywhere. It's led to anger, resentment, contempt for institutions. And when you have a period of unfocused anger, resentment and so on, it's fertile territory for demagogues to arise, and try to mobilize it, and blame it, not on its sources. So, like not on the international financial institutions that are lying behind it to a substantial extent. But to focus it on scapegoats. Typically, people even more vulnerable than you are, immigrants, Muslims, Afro-Americans. This goes way back to Ronald Reagan's "Welfare queens" and so on and many other demagogues in the past. So yes, that's rising. There are also counter-forces that are rising. Now they're very significant. It's pretty common these days to quote Gramsci's famous —

MH: Interregnum.

NC: Yeah, Interregnum with morbid symptoms, but there are morbid symptoms and there are positive symptoms. And it's a real question which will prevail.

MH: Let's talk about Donald Trump specifically. You have witnessed, I think 16 presidents over the course of your lifetime. Donald Trump being the 16th. How does Trump stack up against the rest of them? Is he sui generis in your view?

NC: Yeah, he's off the spectrum. But the fact is that that's true of the Republican Party generally. Two well-known commentators from the American Enterprise Institute, Thomas Mann and Norman Orenstein years ago, described the Republican Party since Newt Gingrich as a radical insurgency that has abandoned parliamentary politics, and is now often a different dimension. What's actually happened is that during the neoliberal period both of the political parties have shifted to the right. So the mainstream Democrats, the ones who are now meeting with their billionaire friends to try to figure out how to get rid of Sanders and Warren, they're basically what used to be called moderate Republicans. The Democrats abandoned the working class by the late '70s. The last bit of a show of interest was the Humphrey Hawkins 1978 Full Employment Bill which Carter watered down so that it had no teeth. And after that, they kind of gave up. They handed the working class over to their class enemy, the Republicans who try to mobilize them on what are called cultural issues. They're shafting them at every turn, including Trump, but you can try to mobilize them on the basis of abortion, immigrants, guns, anything but the real issues.

MH: And I agree with you that the Republican party as you said, you call them the biggest threat to mankind in terms of their views on climate change. As you say, the radical insurgency, but having said that, even a Ted Cruz or a Mike Pence, as radical as they may be, they still fit within some sort of understandable political prism. Trump, as you say, is off the spectrum. Have you ever seen a western Democratic leader like him in your lifetime? Who behaves like him, talks like him?

NC: No. But it's worth looking back a little bit. So for the last, I suppose, 15 years, take a look at the Republican primaries. Every Republican primary, a candidate who arose from the base was so outrageous that the Republican establishment tried and succeeded in suppressing them. Michele Bachmann —

Michele Bachmann: Carbon dioxide is not a harmful gas. It is a harmless gas.

NC: Rick Santorum —

Rick Santorum: I don't want to make Black people's lives better by giving them somebody else's money.

NC: Herman Cain —

Herman Cain: Ubeki-beki-beki-beki-stan-stan.

NC: All madmen, and they managed to suppress them. What was different in 2016 is that they failed. And the guy who came into office over their opposition was a megalomaniac, narcissist, kind of like a three-year-old who's enjoying the opportunity to smash everything in sight and knows he can get away with it and a very good politician. He has his finger on the pulse of his voting constituency. It's a kind of an adoring constituency that will support him no matter what he does, and he's playing to that gallery. The only policy that you can discern clearly in the Trump administration is a very simple one: me. Anything that benefits me I'll do no matter what the consequences. If it destroys the world, okay.

MH: While acknowledging that point and you're hundred percent right to talk about his kind of narcissism and egomania, but is it also fair now to describe the president as a white nationalist or white supremacist? Because when I spoke to you in 2016, shortly after his election, you made the point that every far-right, nationalist, neo-Nazi has been encouraged and excited by his victory, you said. But then you said we don't know what direction he'll go in. We don't know if he'll go in that direction. Given the last three years, the Charlottesville, the, you know, what's been going on recently, the attacks on synagogues and mosques, his far-right rallies where they chant "send them back," it's pretty clear that he has now gone in a full on white nationalist white supremacist direction, isn't it?

NC: But that's part of the problem of the Republican party. Its primary constituency is extreme wealth and corporate power. Those are the ones they serve. So you take the one legislative achievement of the Trump administration, the tax scam. That was for the rich and the very rich and the corporate sector. Take deregulation, does it help working people to eliminate eliminate health and safety conditions in the workplace? Does it increase profits? Okay, we know the answer. Same across the board.

So you run across the legislative programs, the ones that are carried out by the really evil characters, Mitch McConnell. Before him, Ryan and so on. Those, those policies are dedicated to the traditional Republican constituency. But you can't get votes on those policies. So you have to mobilize some kind of a voting base. And the way they did it is, as I described it, as you know.

MH: Mobilize the racists.

NC: So if it turns out that white nationalists are the voting base that you can mobilize, Trump will become a white nationalist. I think it does him too much credit to attribute to him beliefs like support for white nationalism, or fascism or anything else. His motive is himself. And he's a good enough politician to understand that the only way he's going to get support is by appealing to those sectors of those sectors of the population. One should bear in mind the utter cynicism of the Republican Party since Reagan.

Take their actual planks. One unbreakable commitment of the Republican party is anti-abortion. What's called pro-life. Where'd that come from? You go back to the 1960s. The

leading republican figures, Ronald Reagan, George HW Bush, all the rest of them were what we call pro-choice. What changed? Well, in the 1970s, Republican strategist, Paul Weyrich, had the brilliant idea that if the Republicans pretended, I stress pretended, to be anti-abortion, they could pick up the evangelical vote and the northern working class Catholic vote. So they turned on a dime. They all became passionately anti-abortion. Take climate change. That's an interesting one. You go just 10 years, 2008 John McCain when he ran for president had a global warming plank, not very strong but something.

John McCain: There are vital measures we can take in the short-term even as we focus on long-term policies to mitigate the effects of global warming.

NC: The Republicans were in fact toying with cap and trade. What happened to it? Very simple. David Koch, died recently. The Koch brothers launched a huge campaign, major juggernaut, bribing congressmen, threatening them, intimidating them. Huge lobbying organization, fake popular organizations to you know, knock on doors and so on. They switched. Now, part of the catechism is you have to be against climate change.

MH: Let's talk impeachment. The Democrats have launched an impeachment inquiry into President Trump specifically around this suggestion that he was pressuring a foreign country Ukraine to dig up dirt on his political opponent and even withholding military aid until they agreed to do so. Do you support the House Democrats' decision to finally start an impeachment inquiry into Donald Trump?

NC: First notice something, they're going after Trump not on his major crimes but because he went after a leading Democrat. Does that remind you of anything? Yes. Watergate. They didn't go after Nixon on his major crimes. They were off the record. It was because he had attacked the Democratic party.

MH: Good point.

NC: So yes, they'll protect themselves. Is it the right thing to do? I mean, Trump is impeachable 100 times over. You know, he's a major crook. There's no doubt about it. Is it politically wise? I frankly doubt it. I think it'll turn out pretty much like the Mueller report, which, that I thought was also a political mistake. What'll happen is probably the House will impeach, goes to the Senate. The Republican senators are utterly craven. They're terrified of Trump's voting base. So they'll vote to turn down the impeachment request. Trump will come along, say I'm vindicated. Say it was the Deep State and the treacherous Dems trying to overturn the election. Oh, vote for me.

MH: I had the filmmaker Michael Moore on the show last week, and he thinks that eventually this evidence is going to pile up against Trump that's so damning — and we've already seen some of the testimony from the acting U.S. ambassador to Ukraine and others — that actually he thinks Republican senators, some of them who you know, who need to save their skins will join Senate Democrats to vote to remove Trump from office. You don't seem to buy that?

NC: I think you may find a handful who will find a way to evade taking a position But if you just look at the record of the party — I gave you a couple of examples, but we could go on — it's very hard to imagine any bit of principle emerging. It's true that if some of them thought they were really going to suffer for it politically or in other ways, maybe they'd change, but that doesn't seem too likely. I mean, just take a look at Trump's voting base, you know, there

are pretty regular polls and studies. They haven't changed. They buy his line. Here's our hero. The one man in the world who's willing to stand up for us.

MH: Although whether it works or not in the Senate, it doesn't mean the House Democrats shouldn't take a stand regardless of whether Republican Senators convict. Can Trump be beaten at the ballot box next November? Is there a Democratic candidate who you think can beat him or more than one candidate?

NC: Well, here it's very interesting to see what's being done. You may have seen a day or two ago in the New York Times was a big article about a meeting of the Democratic centrists, the establishment, the billionaires, the donors, you know, the mainstream political figures. And it was about, their concern about just what you asked, is there a Democrat who can defeat Trump? And they went through the possible Democratic candidates and discussed their flaws, and then asked, can we bring in someone else like Bloomberg or Michelle Obama? Take a look at the leading candidates they listed: Warren, Biden and Mayor Pete. Do you notice somebody missing?

MH: Senator Sanders doesn't make the cut of these lists.

NC: There's a very good reason for it. He has absolutely infuriated the liberal establishment by committing a major crime. It's not his policies. His crime was to organize an ongoing political movement that doesn't just show up at the polls every four years and push a button, but keeps working. That's no good. The rabble is supposed to stay home. Their job is to watch not to participate.

MH: To be fair to Elizabeth Warren, who you mentioned a moment ago, she has upset a lot of big democratic donors.

News caster: Some Democratic donors on Wall Street are reportedly threatening to vote for President Trump or sit out of the 2020 election cycle if the party nominates Elizabeth Warren.

MH: Is she someone you're not impressed with, are impressed with? What's your take on Senator Elizabeth Warren?

NC: I think she's seems to me quite honest. I think many of her plans are perfectly reasonable. She's working with quite serious economists, some of them friends. But she doesn't pretend to be to try, to hoping to institute radical institutional changes. Sanders does. Furthermore, she has not organized a mass political movement which Sanders did. And it's had a lot of effect. That's how you get people in Congress like Ocasio-Cortez and others because of this movement.

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez: It wasn't until I heard of a man by the name of Bernie Sanders that I began to assert and recognize my inherent value.

NC: That's scary. Nobody in the political mainstream wants that.

MH: Some argue, as you know, Bernie Sanders is a deeply controversial figure for good reasons and bad. You know, he's a divisive figure, again, for good reasons or bad depending on your perspective. Some would say with Elizabeth Warren, you get the best of both worlds,

you get left wing policies, but you get a candidate who can reach out across the Democratic party. Why not go with her instead of Bernie Sanders?

NC: Well, you can make that calculation. I think it's up to individuals to decide.

MH: But Bernie's got your vote, it's fair to say?

NC: If I were voting in the primary, I would vote for him. But I think Warren would be a reasonable candidate, almost anybody you can think of, you know, the next guy you meet in the street would be better than Trump.

MH: Of course, of course, even Joe Biden, what's your view of Joe Biden?

NC: (laughs) You know, he's a kind of a mild Obama. Nothing very special. I suspect in a debate with Trump, I think he'd probably be overwhelmed just by the showmanship and the deceit and the lies, but he'd certainly be better candidate than Trump.

MH: I suspect you're right about him being overwhelmed. One of the things that a lot of Bernie Sanders supporters point to, they say, "Look, Elizabeth Warren says she's a capitalist to her bones. Bernie says he's a socialist." Do you think it's accurate to describe Bernie Sanders, number one, do you think is accurate to describe him as a socialist? And number two, how would you define your own politics, your own ideology?

MC: Well, I don't think the word socialism should even be used in this context. Bernie Sanders is a decent person. I like what he's doing. To be quite frank, his major policies would not have surprised President Eisenhower very much. He's a progressive, New Deal Democrat. Politics has shifted so far to the right during the neoliberal period that things that were sort of conventional and mainstream 50-60 years ago now sound radical.

MH: So why do you think he calls himself a socialist given it's not going to help him with the electorate? Why do you think he describes himself as a socialist then?

NC: Well, you know, what does socialism mean these days? Socialism means the New Deal. In the United States, you don't call it socialism because socialism is a curse word. We're a very business-run society.

MH: That's my point. He uses the word to self-define in that way when it doesn't really help him. And you're saying he's not one.

NC: He is if you want to use the term that way. Most terms of political discourse have almost totally lost their meaning. So, Reagan is called a free-market Republican. His administration intervened radically in the market over and over for the benefit of the rich.

MH: So on that point then, dare I ask, how would you define your own politics, your own ideology? Is there a label we could give you?

NC: By now I don't even like labels, but I've been more or less, I hate to use the word because it's so misunderstood, but one or another form of anarchist all my life and never saw any reason to change. Actually, I think most people are anarchists in the traditional sense.

MH: How would you define that to someone listening at home saying, “Well, what does that mean if Noam Chomsky is an anarchist?”

NC: Well, what does anarchism mean? And it’s the whole long tradition actually going back to classical liberalism. It fundamentally means opposition to structures of authority and domination unless they can justify themselves. Illegitimate structures of domination and hierarchy ranging from paternalistic family to business which is a tyranny in which people rent themselves as slaves, to international affairs. Anywhere across this domain if you find illegitimate authority, it should be eliminated. I suspect most people believe that. Of course, that means lots of consequences. It means they should be opposed to private tyrannies. People who are called libertarians in the United States, strange notion, very anti-libertarian, are fundamentally calling for rule by unaccountable private tyrannies. I don’t see anything libertarian about that.

Mh: That’s a very good point and I kind of know where you stand on the economy and on foreign policy. What I’m wondering is where do you stand on issues of political reform? Do you think it’s time for the Democrats to take action to fix the ridiculously undemocratic and archaic U.S. political system, would you, for example, support abolishing the Electoral College and the Senate filibuster? Would you back packing the Supreme Court to undo Gorsuch and Kavanaugh? Would you support statehood for DC and Puerto Rico?

NC: Well, you have to take each case on its own. Take the Electoral College, that’s bad enough, take the Senate. The Senate is one of the most undemocratic institutions in the western world. Take a look at the number of voters that each senator represents. If a country tried to enter the European Union with the U.S. political system, they’d be turned down by the European Court of Justice. I mean, there’s a whole history here that has to be thought of. The Constitution in the 18th century, though it was a pretty conservative doctrine nevertheless, by the standards of the eighteenth century was pretty novel and even progressive in some respects.

But to adhere to the 18th century constitution in the 21st century is a pretty strange phenomenon. I mean, take the people who are called originalists, you know the right-wing originalist Gorsuch and so on who say we have to interpret the Constitution the way the founders and the framers in the 18th century understood it. I mean, does that even approach rationality? To discuss the modern world the way somebody in 1780 perceived it?

MH: So you would like to see the Democrats take a much stronger line on some of these issues, on changing some of this stuff?

NC: Well, you’re living in the real world, not in some ideal world. We’re actually facing a constitutional crisis. The way the demography and the political structure are organized, it’s increasingly becoming the case that a very small sector of voters, maybe 20% or so, who are white, often white nationalist, Christian, often Evangelical, traditional, older, less educated, rural, can actually run the country. And that can’t be changed by amendment, because there’s enough votes in the small states to prevent it. How do you deal with this? Well, you have to deal with it piecemeal in some fashion. Maybe you’d like to say this very reactionary system should be overturned. But that’s like saying I’d like to have peace on earth.

MH: But you could do stuff like pack the Supreme Court which doesn’t require any constitutional amendments?

NC: That's a possible tactic, but even that wouldn't get you very far and it could avert some of the extreme reactionary decisions of the Roberts Court, which is the most reactionary in living memory. You'd have to go far back to find anything like it. But the serious issues, like for example, the un-amendable commitment to a radically undemocratic Senate, that's going to be hard to change.

MH: Before we finish, you've lived through and documented, analyzed the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Cold War, the Vietnam War, Watergate, the Reagan era, the Iraq War, the financial crisis. Given that, how unique, how toxic even, is this current political moment that we're living through right now?

NC: The current moment, not just political, is the most grim moment in human history. We are now in a situation where this generation, in fact, in the next few years, is going to have to make a decision of cosmic significance which has never arisen before: Will organized human society survive? And there are two enormous threats. The threat of environmental catastrophe, which at least is getting some attention, not enough. The other is the threat of nuclear war, which is increasing sharply by the Trump administration, in fact. These have to be dealt with quickly. Otherwise, there's nothing to talk about.

And notice that the wrecking ball in the White House just doesn't give a damn. He's having fun. He's serving his rich constituency. So what the hell, let's destroy the world. And it's not that they don't know it. Some months ago, maybe a year ago by now, one of the Trump bureaucracies the National Transportation Administration came out with what I think is the most astonishing document in the entire history of the human species. It got almost no attention. It was a long 500-page environmental assessment in which they tried to determine what the environment would be like at the end of the century. And they concluded, by the end of the century, temperatures will have risen seven degrees Fahrenheit, that's about twice the level that scientists regard as feasible for organized human life. The World Bank describes it as cataclysmic. So what's their conclusion? Conclusion is we should have no more constraints on automotive emissions. The reasoning is very solid. We're going off the cliff anyway. So why not have fun? Has anything like that ever appeared in human history? There's nothing like it.

MH: There's nothing like this administration in particular. One last question before I let you go, you're about to turn 91 years old. You're still going strong doing interviews like this one, teaching at the University of Arizona. What keeps you going? What motivates you? I'm sure a lot of people listening would like to know.

NC: What's the alternative? It's fine. It's easy, personal life. You know, the political scene, the issues that have to be addressed, professional work which is exciting, all the things in life that make life worth living.

MH: Do you ever get exhausted having to campaign and argue and debate and push for these things decade after decade?

NC: Not really, just more incentive as time goes on.

MH: Professor Noam Chomsky, thank you so much for joining me on Deconstructed.

NC: Very pleased to be with you.

MH: That was Noam Chomsky and that's our show! *Deconstructed* is a production of First Look Media and The Intercept. Our producer is Zach Young. The show was mixed by Bryan Pugh. Our theme music was composed by Bart Warshaw. Betsy Reed is The Intercept's editor in chief.