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Naomi Klein on How Trump, Musk, Far Right “Don’t Believe in the Future”



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Transcript

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AMY GOODMAN: This is *Democracy Now!*, democracynow.org, *The War and Peace Report*. I'm Amy Goodman.

We spend the rest of the hour with award-winning journalist and author Naomi Klein. She has a major new [piece](#) out, co-authored with Astra Taylor, for *The Guardian* newspaper. It's headlined "The rise of end times fascism." It looks at the apocalyptic fervor of the far right.

In it, they write, quote, “[T]he most powerful people in the world are preparing for the end of the world, an end they themselves are frenetically accelerating. That is not so far away from the more mass-market vision of fortified nations that has gripped the [hard] right globally, from Italy to Israel, Australia to the United States: in a time of ceaseless peril, openly supremacist movements in these countries are positioning their relatively wealthy states as armed bunkers,” Naomi Klein writes.

She is also professor of climate justice at the University of British Columbia, founding co-director of the UBC Centre for Climate Justice. Her latest book, *Doppelganger: A Trip into the Mirror World*.

Naomi, welcome back to *Democracy Now!* It’s great to have you with us. If you can start off by talking about your [piece](#) and what exactly you mean by talking about the end times, fascism?

NAOMI KLEIN: Well, it’s very good to be with you, Amy.

This isn’t the most cheerful piece I’ve ever written, with Astra Taylor, a very close collaborator, founder of the Debt Collective. And we were trying to kind of map what is similar and what is different about the type of far-right politics that we’re seeing today. And I should say, the piece is not only grim. It also looks at what this can mean for a response to this particular form of fascism, because we can’t fight it if we don’t understand it. So, I think a lot of very good scholarship attempting to understand authoritarianism today, whether it’s Trump or figures like Duterte or Modi, have looked at similarities between these far-right figures and, say, Mussolini or Hitler, and have taken a kind of a checklist approach of looking at what is similar to the past, right? And I think there’s a lot of value in that. But the risk of it is that it doesn’t look at what is new and what is particular to our time.

Fascism always is an attempt by the right to resolve a crisis of its own era. Right? So, in the 1930s, they were attempting to resolve, you know, in Germany, the humiliations of the First World War, the impacts of the Great Depression, and to propose a unity in the face of that for the in-group. But our moment is different, and one of the things that makes it different – I mean, if you think about fascism in the 1930s, this is before the atomic bomb. It’s before they understood climate change. And we are in a moment where our elites, whether they admit it or not, do understand that our economic model – and I’ve written books about this and talked about it with you in the past – is at war with life on Earth, right? And they are barreling down this road of more and more extraction of fossil fuels, of all kinds of – you know, basically, anything they can extract from this Earth and turn into energy and money, particularly now with AI, which is a energy and resource hog – water, LNG, critical minerals, all of it.

So, we’re trying to understand how this is informing the kind of fascism that we’re seeing, and also we’re trying to understand what unites this kind of strange Frankenstein coalition that Trump represents, where he’s bringing together these – you know, the richest people in the world who have ever existed with many working-class people, so what binds the vision, right?

And what we cope with in this piece, or what we propose in this piece, is that they all have given up on this world. Like, they all have bought into a kind of apocalyptic fever — right? — whether it's Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos and their investments in outer space and sort of writing off this planet, whether AI, which is willing to sacrifice this animate world in order to build an artificial world, or whether it's the more populist MAGA vision of the fortress nation-state — right? — which is thinking, "OK, we know more and more people are going to be coming. We know that disaster is on the horizon." I've listened to a lot of Steve Bannon for — you know, when I was writing *Doppelganger*, and it's all very survivalist, right? You know, all of the commercials, pretty much, are selling, you know, gold, because the economy is going to collapse, you know, ready-to-eat meals for 90 days, because you never know what's going to happen. So, it sees the nation and the in-group as being inside the bunker, and then it's exiling the out-group to all of these lawless territories that you've been covering on the show. So, it's not the same vision, but what it shares is this apocalyptic fever.

And then, of course, all of it is following a similar structure, like narrative structure, to the biblical Rapture. And, of course, you have people who believe in that within the Trump coalition, who are, you know, Christian Zionists, like Mike Huckabee and Pete Hegseth, who believe that the actual end times is coming, and they think it's all going to go down in Israel. And all of the horror that you report on so well and so committedly on the show, these are all good signs if you believe in the Rapture, right? Because it means that the end is coming, and the faithful are going to be lifted up to a golden city in the sky. So, you know, what we're looking at is like the religious version of that story, the the fundamentalist religious version of that story, where you literally believe you're going to be saved and taken up to heaven, but also the secular vision, where your wealth protects you, or your citizenship protects you, and you get your own version of that golden, bunkered city.

AMY GOODMAN: You mentioned Gaza, and you just came from the Jewish Voice for Peace conference in Baltimore, where several thousand people gathered from around the country. Our latest headline, the Israeli military calling up tens of thousands of reservists as Israel's security cabinet unanimously approved plans this weekend to expand its assault on Gaza, where Israel has already killed over 52,000 Palestinians — and that's by far an undercount — in the last 18, 19 months. Israel has killed more than 2,400 Palestinians just since it shattered the ceasefire in March. This comes as Israel's devastating blockade in food aid has entered its third month. Palestinian health officials say 57 Palestinians have already starved to death. According to UNICEF, more than 9,000 children have been admitted for treatment for acute malnutrition so far this year. And aid groups, like Norwegian Refugee Council, blasting a new Israeli proposal to take control in distribution and put U.S. security contractors in charge. If you can talk, as you so often do, about what's happening in Gaza and the West Bank and what the centrality of Israel in President Trump and the current U.S. government — although it was also the past, President Biden's worldview and approach to foreign policy?

NAOMI KLEIN: So, I don't think there is a single answer to understanding what the driving forces are. And this is what we're trying to get at, is that there's a kind of an

overlap of these different apocalyptic worldviews. Some of them are religious, and some of them are secular, right? So, I think that people who subscribe to this, like, literalist version of the Rapture believe that all of this is good news, in the sense that, according to the story that they believe in, that the Israelites have to return to Greater Israel. Those are the preconditions for the return of the Messiah. They have to rebuild the Third Temple. So you have this convergence of interests between the religious extremists and the Netanyahu government, who are absolutely committed to rebuilding the Third Temple. They really want to do it. They want to destroy Al-Aqsa. This is why so much attention is focused on it.

But then, you know, does Trump believe that? I don't think Trump believes that. I mean, what he views for Gaza is he sees resources. He sees money. He sees a private, you know, resort.

AMY GOODMAN: Resort.

NAOMI KLEIN: Exactly. But this is something I've been saying from the beginning. I think the interests have been fairly consistent in terms of what the end goal is, which is a depopulation of Gaza, pushing Palestinians out, whether through death or whether through forced exile, whether through ethnic cleansing. And under the Biden administration, there was a denial that that was what was going on. And under the Trump administration, it's all out in the open. So, you know, this is what is going on.

Now, what the reason for that is, I think, differs. But this is what — part of what we're getting at in the piece, Astra and I, is that there is a confluence of interests in terms of what Israel represents. Some of the supporters of the Trump administration in the tech industry are talking about wanting freedom cities, for instance, these privatized, corporate cities. And they talk about this as tech Zionism. They have a lot of admiration for the idea that Israel was created, they say, you know, from a book, Theodor Herzl's books. And they said, "Well, why can't we start our own country, our own private countries? Why do we have to — you know, why do we have to abide by the rules of the nation-state?"

So, I think part of the support for Israel isn't just our classic understandings either of Jewish Zionism or Christian Zionism, although that's absolutely going on. It's also this idea of a very technologically advanced startup country, right? Israel has marketed itself that way. And a lot of these tech companies want to do that in San Francisco. They want to push everybody out who doesn't agree with them, who's poor, who have more needs, and create their kind of corporate, privatized utopia. So, you know, I'm not saying this is a coherent agenda. I'm saying that there's a lot of overlapping stories that follow a similar structure and share similar goals, if that makes sense.

AMY GOODMAN: I mean, yes, I mean, the overall issue, obviously, is hard to make sense of.

NAOMI KLEIN: Mm-hmm, yeah.

AMY GOODMAN: And most Trump's supporters are neither wealthy nor are they Christian Zionists. So, why are they backing this whole approach?

NAOMI KLEIN: Well, it's not clear the extent to which they actively back it, but I think that they see a kinship in the ethnostate — right? — because a lot of Trump supporters are becoming increasingly Christian nationalist about the United States. And this has been carefully fostered by figures like Steve Bannon. And so, when they look at Israel, they see a country that is openly an ethnostate that is fortressing itself in a sea of its enemies, you know, and they want to do something similar. And they're sharing technologies. They're sharing, you know, legal precedents, tools. So, there's a — you know, there's a kinship. And, you know, we're seeing this now with India with its attacks on Kashmir, following us, you know, using similar techniques that, you know, Israel has used in Gaza. So, there is a kind of a solidarity of the ethnostates. And they are sharing — you know, they're even trading trinkets of golden pagers and swapping chainsaws. You know, this is something that we — I think, you know, when you're inside the crucible of it here in the United States under Trump, it's hard to see the extent to which this is an international project on the right, and they are influencing one another.

AMY GOODMAN: And what does unite them, you know, this whole fortress mentality, is this hatred of immigrants. You have —

NAOMI KLEIN: Yeah.

AMY GOODMAN: — President Trump just saying he doesn't even know — he's not a lawyer, so he doesn't know if he has to uphold the Constitution, he said.

NAOMI KLEIN: Right. I mean, this is what I'm trying to get at about the awareness that we are in an age of consequences, that when you don't act in the face of the climate crisis for decades, when scientists have been warning you, that more and more of the world becomes uninhabitable, and, lo and behold, people move to try to find safety in the face of wars, in the face of economic deprivation and in the face of ecological disasters.

And so, that fortressing of the nation-state — and this is what I think, you know, Israel's come to represent, just as a very small nation that is extremely fortified — right? — whether it's with the high-tech walls, the Iron Dome. Trump says now, "I want not an Iron Dome, but a golden dome." Right? That —

AMY GOODMAN: Here.

NAOMI KLEIN: Here. That all of this is, whether it's stated explicitly or not —

AMY GOODMAN: And a military parade that'll cost tens of millions —

NAOMI KLEIN: Yeah.

AMY GOODMAN: — of dollars, even as he slices and dices the government, on his birthday, in June.

NAOMI KLEIN: Right. So the pattern is protecting the in-group and exiling and cleansing the out-groups. Right? And so, that, I think, is — you know, if there is support among the MAGA base for Israel, it's less out of a love for Israel than more out of an identification, like they are doing what we want to do here.

AMY GOODMAN: You write many things in your [piece](#), and I just want to go to one of them. You say — in talking about Musk’s apocalyptic vision, you talk about, and also detailing the end times fascism, this whole issue of the rise of the city state, the corporate city state. I think this is a new concept for many. They’re not going to know what you’re talking about.

NAOMI KLEIN: Yeah.

AMY GOODMAN: In southern Texas, Starbase, just this group of people, who are mainly workers at SpaceX, have just voted to make a city right there?

NAOMI KLEIN: Mm-hmm, yeah. And we’ve had sort of — I mean, the idea of a company town is not entirely new, right? And Disney had Celebration, Florida, and there are lineages to this, right? Colonial lineages to this. You know, I live in Canada, which started as the Hudson’s Bay Company, right? So it was a company before it was a country. So there is some precedent for this.

But I think what this is — I’ve been following this out of the corner of my eye, Amy, because this is where libertarians have been going for a while. There was an — Peter Thiel has been obsessed with this idea. It’s increasingly being called exit, so exiting the nation and just starting your own country, where you can set your own tax level, you can make your own regulations.

AMY GOODMAN: Or not.

NAOMI KLEIN: Or not. And countries — and these little corporate countries will compete with one another to try to attract capital, right? So, in a way, it’s an extension of the free trade zone — right? — where this is, in a way, like a denationalized country within a country. But Trump started to float this in 2023, the idea that he would create 10 freedom cities, on the campaign trail. I don’t think his base much knew what he was talking about. But now you have all these lobbyists who fully intend to take him up on it. And we’re starting to see the beginning of this with this SpaceX city.

AMY GOODMAN: So, you also write about El Salvador’s Terrorism Confinement Center, the notorious prison, CECOT, where so many hundreds of people have been sent from the United States, and at the same time, in the last 24 hours, President Trump saying he wants to reopen the notorious Alcatraz —

NAOMI KLEIN: Yeah.

AMY GOODMAN: — an island in San Francisco. If you can talk about the prison as a model for what Trump wants to put forward, and particularly in relation, as we see motivating so much, to immigrants?

NAOMI KLEIN: Well, this is an incredibly bleak vision. So, repression is always a huge part of any kind of fascist project, right? You need to contain the out-group. You need to disappear the out-group. So this part of it is not new. But I think what is so worrying to me is that Trump was elected promising all kinds of things to his base, right? He promised to eliminate inflation. He promised to bring these great jobs home. He’s not

delivering on any of that. So the sadistic part of his project is really all he has to offer, right?

I think one of the most chilling things I've ever seen in the United States was Trump sharing that video at his hundred-day rally of just pure sadism, of just looking at prisoners, as entertainment, being shaved, being shackled, being paraded. And he's not delivering on the price of eggs. And he's not delivering on the jobs, by the way, because he's throwing all in— he's going all in on AI. So the jobs that are coming back seem to be mainly for robots. It's not actually for his base. And so, this scales up the need for the sadism and these spectacles, right? And I think that that's what something like Alcatraz represents. He's a TV producer, first and foremost, right? He's producing spectacles. And the less he has to offer economically, tangibly, materially, the more he leans on the sadism.

AMY GOODMAN: You write, "The governing ideology of the far right ... has become a monstrous, supremacist survivalism. ... Our task is to build a movement strong enough to stop them." What would that movement look like, or what do you see is being formed right now?

NAOMI KLEIN: You know, what we're doing in this [piece](#) by laying out the bleakness of the vision — and when I say "bleakness," you know, I think it's beyond something we've seen before, because there's always an apocalyptic quality to fascism, but fascism of the 1930s and '40s had a horizon. Like, after the apocalypse, people were being promised a future, a pastoral, peaceful little piece of land where they could live out their lives, you know? Even though Trump talks about a golden age, there really isn't a future that the base believes in, you know? And this is what I've learned by consuming far too much MAGA media, Amy. They envision a future of endless war, right? And this is why they're bunkering down. This is why they're buying ready-to-eat meals to last. This is why they're buying gold and crypto. They think the whole thing is going down. So —

AMY GOODMAN: And why Elon Musk is trying to have so many children, at least 14 at this point. But he's actually explicitly texted it, saying, "We've got to do this much faster," as he proposed to one of the women he has children with, saying, "We've got to start using surrogates."

NAOMI KLEIN: So, they don't believe in the future, is the bottom line. And that is — you know, I think I've been in a lot of progressive spaces in recent months where we've talked about building these very broad coalitions, including with people who we don't entirely disagree with. I've never encountered a potential coalition more broad than the idea of: How about if we believe in this world? How about if we believe in the future? Because we're up against people who are actively betting against the future, right? Not just actively betting against it —

AMY GOODMAN: Twenty seconds.

NAOMI KLEIN: — but fueling the fires that are burning this world, actively fueling it. So, I think that if we have the courage, really, to look at the bleakness of what they believe in, which is an apocalyptic future, then we have our work cut out for us of being the people

who actually believe in this realm, in this world, in the beauty of creation and of each other.

AMY GOODMAN: Naomi Klein, I want to thank you for being with us, award-winning journalist, author, columnist. We'll link to your [piece](#) with Astra Taylor, "The rise of end times fascism." I'm Amy Goodman. This is *Democracy Now!*

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