



wake up! WAKE UP! IT'S YER CHRISTMAS

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CHOM'PIN AT THE BIT

Noam Chomsky first gained academic acclaim in the 60s and 70s with his theories about how people learn language. He then studied the workings of the US government in all their gory detail, producing an avalanche of books, ranging from US foreign policy and imperialism to the brainwashing role of the corporate media. Chomsky is now known as one of America's leading voices of dissent. SchNEWS went to interview him on his recent trip to London, but we didn't know what to expect. **Condescending academic? Rabble-rousing revolutionary? What we found was neither of these, but simply an intelligent, honest man with a lot of knowledge about the rhetoric and motives fuelling Bush's America. It was like talking to your grandfather who just happens to have a dead-on critique of the American war machine. So here's a partial transcript of the interview that took place between Chomsky, SchNEWS, Comedian Mark Thomas (who set the whole thing up) and a collection of other British trouble makers.**

Mark Thomas: If we can start with US foreign policy in relation to Iraq and the War on Terror, what do you think is going on at the moment?

Noam Chomsky: First of all I think we ought to be very cautious about using the phrase 'War on Terror'. There can't be a War on Terror. It's a logical impossibility. The US is one of the leading terrorist states in the world. The guys who are in charge right now were all condemned for terrorism by the World Court. They would have been condemned by the U.N. Security Council except they vetoed the resolution, with Britain abstaining of course. These guys can't be conducting a war on terror. It's just out of the question. They declared a war on terror 20 years ago and we know what they did. They destroyed Central America. They killed a million and a half people in southern Africa. We can go on through the list. So there's no 'War on Terror'.

There was a terrorist act, September 11th, very unusual, a real historic event, the first time in history that the west received the kind of attack that it carries out routinely in the rest of the world. September 11th did change policy undoubtedly, not just for the US, but across the board. Every government in the world saw it as an opportunity to intensify their own repression and atrocities, from Russia and Chechnya, to the West imposing more discipline on their populations.

This had big effects - for example take Iraq. Prior to September 11th, there was a longstanding concern of the US toward Iraq - that is it has the second largest oil reserves in the world. So one way or another the US was going to do something to get it, that's

clear. September 11th gave the pretext. There's a change in the rhetoric concerning Iraq after September 11th - 'We now have an excuse to go ahead with what we're planning.'

It kinda stayed like that up to September of this year when Iraq suddenly shifted... to 'An imminent threat to our existence.' Condoleeza Rice [US National Security Advisor] came out with her warning that the next evidence of a nuclear weapon would be a mushroom cloud over New York. There was a big media campaign with political figures - we needed to destroy Saddam this winter or we'd all be dead. You've got to kind of admire the intellectual classes not to notice that the only people in the world who are afraid of Saddam Hussien are Americans. Everybody hates him and Iraqis are undoubtedly afraid of him, but outside of Iraq and the United States, no one's afraid of him. Not Kuwait, not Iran, not Israel, not Europe. They hate him, but they're not afraid of him.

In the United States people are very much afraid, there's no question about it. The support you see in US polls for the war is very thin, but it's based on fear. It's an old story in the United States. When my kids were in elementary school 40 years ago they were taught to hide under desks in case of an atom bomb attack. I'm not kidding. The country is always in fear of everything. Crime for example: Crime in the United States is roughly comparable with other industrial societies, towards the high end of the spectrum. On the other hand, fear of crime is way beyond other industrial societies...

It's very consciously engendered. These guys now in office, remember they're almost entirely from the 1980s. They've been through it already and they know exactly how to play the game. Right through the 1980s they periodically had campaigns to terrify the population...

To create fear is not that hard, but this time the timing was so obviously for the Congressional campaign that even political commentators got the message. The presidential campaign is going to be starting in the middle of next year. They've got to have a victory under their belt. And on to the next adventure. Otherwise, the population's going to pay attention to what's happening to them, which is a big assault, a major assault on the population, just as in the 1980s. They're replaying the record almost exactly. First thing they did in the 1980s, in 1981, was drive the country into a big deficit. This time they did it with a tax cut for the rich and the biggest increase in federal spending in 20 years.

This happens to be an unusually corrupt administration, kind of like an Enron admin-

CRAPARREST OF THE WEEK

For making a joke down the pub!

An American who made a remark about a "burning bush" was sentenced this month to 37 months in prison for "threatening to kill or harm the president." Richard Humphreys said he got into a barroom discussion with a truck driver in which he joked about the biblical expression "burning bush." A bartender who overheard the conversation knew that Bush was visiting the area the next day and so telephoned police. "I said God might speak to the world through a burning Bush," Humphreys testified during his trial. "I had said that before and I thought it was funny."

istration, so there's a tremendous amount of profit going into the hands of an unusually corrupt group of gangsters. You can't really have all this stuff on the front pages, so you have to push it off the front pages. You have to keep people from thinking about it. And there's only one way that anybody ever figured out to frighten people and they're good at it.

So there's domestic political factors that have to do with timing. September 11th gave the pretext and there's a long term, serious interest [in Iraq]. So they've gotta go to war... my speculation would be that they would like to have it over with before the presidential campaign.

The problem is that when you're in a war, you don't know what's going to happen. The chances are it'll be a pushover, it ought to be, there's no Iraqi army, the country will probably collapse in two minutes, but you can't be sure of that. If you take the CIA warnings seriously, they're pretty straight about it. They're saying that if there's a war, Iraq may respond with terrorist acts...

US adventurism is just driving countries into developing weapons of mass destruction as a deterrent - they don't have any other deterrent. Conventional forces don't work obviously, there's no external deterrent. The only way anyone can defend themselves is with terror and weapons of mass destruction. So it's plausible to assume that they're doing it. I suppose that's the basis for the CIA analysis and I suppose the British intelligence are saying the same thing.

But you don't want to have that happen in the middle of a presidential campaign... There is the problem about what to do with the effects of the war, but that's easy. You count on journalists and intellectuals not to talk about it. How many people are talking about Afghanistan? Afghanistan's back where it was, run by warlords and gangsters and who's writing about it? Almost nobody. If it goes back to what it was no one cares, everyone's forgotten about it.

If Iraq turns into people slaughtering each

other, I could write the articles right now. 'Backward people, we tried to save them but they want to murder each other because they're dirty Arabs.' By then, I presume, I'm just guessing, they [the US] will be onto the next war, which will probably be either Syria or Iran.

The fact is that war with Iran is probably underway. It's known that about 12% of the Israeli airforce is in south eastern Turkey. They're there because they're preparing for the war against Iran. They don't care about Iraq. Iraq they figure's a pushover, but Iran has always been a problem for Israel. It's the one country in the region that they can't handle and they've been after the US to take it on for years. According to one report, the Israeli airforce is now flying at the Iranian border for intelligence, provocation and so on. And it's not a small airforce. It's bigger than the British airforce, bigger than any NATO power other than the US. So it's probably underway. There are claims that there are efforts to stir up Asseri separatism, which makes some sense. It's what the Russians tried to do in 1946, and that would separate Iran, or what's left of Iran, from the Caspian oil producing centres. Then you could partition it. That will probably be underway at the time and then there'll be a story about how Iran's going to kill us tomorrow, so we need to get rid of them today. At least that's been the pattern.

Campaign Against Arms Trade: How far do you see the vast military production machine that is America requiring war as an advertisement for their equipment?

Chomsky: You have to remember that what's called military industry is just hi-tech industry. The military is a kind of cover for the state sector in the economy. At MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] where I am, everybody knows this except the economists. Everybody else knows it because it pays their salaries. The money comes into places like MIT under military contract to produce the next generation of the hi-tech economy. If you take a look at what's called the new economy - computers, internet - it comes straight out of places like MIT under federal contracts for research and development under the cover of military production. Then it gets handed to IBM when you can sell something.

At MIT the surrounding area used to have small electronics firms. Now it has small biotech firms. The reason is that the next cutting edge of the economy is going to be biology based. So funding from the government for biology based research is vastly increasing. If you want to have a small start-up company that will make you a huge amount of money when somebody buys it someday, you do it in genetic engineering, biotechnology and so on. This goes right through history. It's usually a dynamic state sector that gets economies going.

One of the reasons the US wants to control the oil is because profits flow back, and they flow in a lot of ways. Its not just oil profits, it's also military sales. The biggest purchaser of US arms and probably British arms is either Saudi Arabia or United Arab Emirates, one of the rich oil producers. They take most of the arms and that's profits for hi-tech industry in the Unites States. The money goes right back to the US treasury and treasury securities. In various ways,

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this helps prop up primarily the US and British economies.

I don't know if you've looked at the records, but in 1958 when Iraq broke the Anglo-American condominium on oil production, Britain went totally crazy. The British at that time were still very reliant on Kuwaiti profits. Britain needed the petrodollars for supporting the British economy and it looked as if what happened in Iraq might spread to Kuwait. So at that point Britain and the US decided to grant Kuwait nominal autonomy, up to then it was just a colony. They said you can run your own post office, pretend you have a flag, that sort of thing. The British said that if anything goes wrong with this we will ruthlessly intervene to ensure maintaining control and the US agreed to the same thing in Saudi Arabia and the Emirates.

CAAT: There's also the suggestion that it's a way of America controlling Europe and the Pacific rim.

Chomsky: Absolutely. The smarter guys like George Kenned were pointing out that control over the energy resources of the middle east gives the US what he called 'veto power' over other countries. He was thinking particularly of Japan. Now the Japanese know this perfectly well so they've been working very hard to try to gain independent access to oil, that's one of the reasons they've tried hard, and succeeded to an extent, to establish relations with Indonesia and Iran and others, to get out of the West-controlled system.

Actually one of the purposes of the [post World War II] Marshall Plan, this great benevolent plan, was to shift Europe and Japan from coal to oil. Europe and Japan both had indigenous coal resources but they switched to oil in order to give the US control. About £2bn out of the £13bn Marshall Plan dollars went straight to the oil companies to help convert Europe and Japan to oil based economies. For power, it's enormously significant to control the resources and oil's expected to be the main resource for the next couple of generations.

The National Intelligence Council, which is a collection of various intelligence agencies, published a projection in 2000 called 'Global Trends 2015.' They make the interesting prediction that terrorism is going to increase as a result of globalisation. They really say it straight. They say that what they call globalisation is going to lead to a widening economic divide, just the opposite of what economic theory predicts, but they're realists, and so they say that it's going to lead to increased disorder, tension and hostility and violence, a lot of it directed against the United States.

They also predict that Persian Gulf oil will be increasingly important for world energy and industrial systems but that the US won't rely on it. But it's got to control it. Controlling the oil resources is more of an issue than access. Because control equals power.

MT: How do you think the current anti-war movement that's building up compares with

RIP PETE This issue is dedicated to Pete Shaughnessy who died last weekend. Pete was one of the main instigators behind Reclaim Bedlam and Mad Pride. He helped out with SchNEWS and Worthing's Porkbolter. His funeral takes place at 9.30am on Christmas Eve, at St Thomas Moore Church, near the library in Lordship Lane, East Dulwich.

Vietnam? What do you think we can achieve as people involved in direct action and protest? Do you think there's a possibility of preventing a war from occurring?

NC: I think that's really hard because the timing is really short. You can make it costly, which is important. Even if it doesn't stop, it's important for the war to be costly to try to stop the next one.

Compared with the Vietnam War movement, this movement is just incomparably ahead now. People talk about the Vietnam War movement, but they forget or don't know what it was actually like. The war in Vietnam started in 1962, publicly, with a public attack on South Vietnam - air force, chemical warfare, concentration camps, the whole business. No protest... the protest that did build up four or five years later was mostly about the bombing of the North, which was terrible but was a sideshow. The main attack was against South Vietnam and there was never any serious protest against that.

This time there's protest before the war has even got started. I can't think of an example in the entire history of Europe, including the United States, when there was ever protest of any substantial level *before* a war. Here you've got massive protest before war's even started. It's a tremendous tribute to changes in popular culture that have taken place in Western countries in the last 30 or 40 years. It's just phenomenal.

SchNEWS: It sometimes seems that as soon as protest breaks out of quite narrow confines, a march every six months maybe, you get attacked. People protesting against the war recently in Brighton were pepper sprayed and batoned for just sitting down in a street.

Chomsky: The more protest there is the more tightening there's going to be, that's routine. When the Vietnam War protests really began to build up, so did the repression. I was very close to a long jail sentence myself and it was stopped by the Tet Offensive. After the Tet Offensive, the establishment turned against the war and they called off the trials. Right now a lot of people could end up in Guantanamo Bay and people are aware of it.

If there's protest in a country then there's going to be repression. Can they get away with it? - it depends a lot on the reaction. In the early 50s in the US, there was what was called Macarthyism and the only reason it succeeded was that there was no resistance to it. When they tried the same thing in the 60s it instantly collapsed because people simply laughed at it so they couldn't do it. Even a dictatorship can't do everything it wants. It's got to have some degree of popular support. And in a more democratic country, there's a very fragile power system. There's nothing secret about this, it's history. The question in all of these things is how much popular resistance there's going to be.

* This is an edited version. If you want to see the whole video, contact Undercurrents 01865 203661, underc@gn.apc.org.

* For more Chomsky stuff (there's loads of it) visit www.zmag.org/chomsky/index.cfm or get some of his books from AK Press: www.akuk.com, 0131-5555615 for a catalogue.

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers we're off to see if there's any room at the Inn for Christmas. Don't worry if you go through cold turkey without us, we'll be back with a cracker on January 10th next year. Honest.