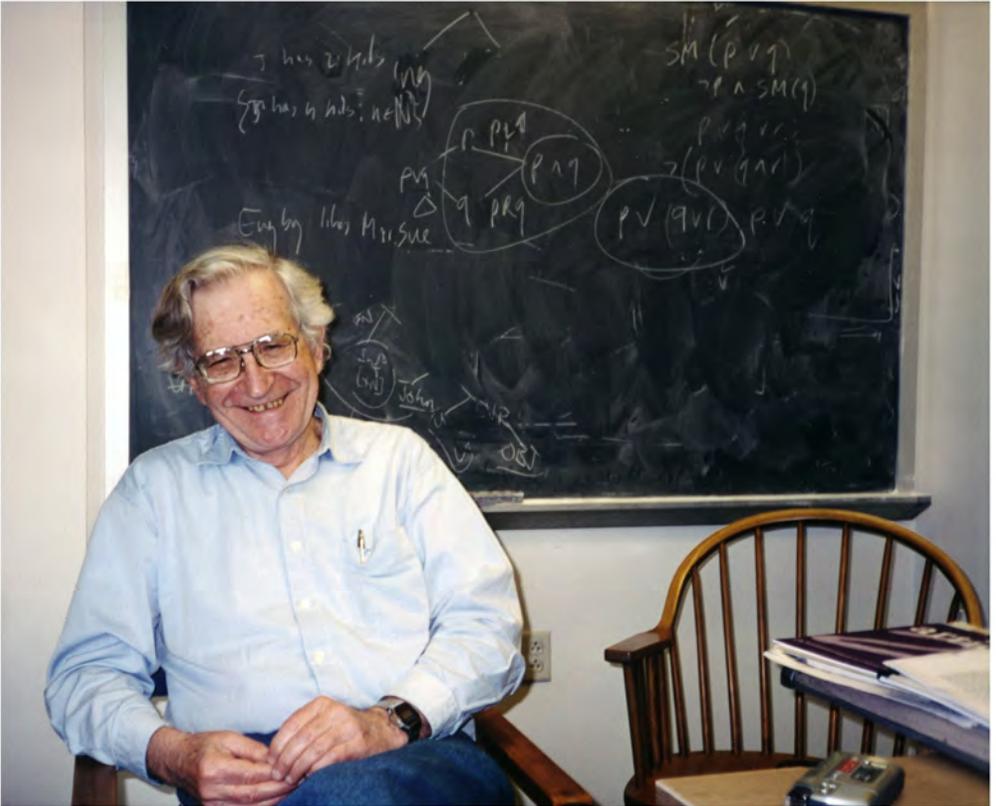


A HATED POLITICAL ENEMY



Allen Bell interviews Noam Chomsky

A HATED POLITICAL ENEMY

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Chomsky, Noam

A Hated Political Enemy : Allen Bell interviews Noam Chomsky

ISBN 0-9736853-0-1

1. Chomsky, Noam--Interviews. 2. Chomsky, Noam--Political and social views.
3. Linguists--United States--Interviews. I. Bell, Allen II. Title.

P85.C47A5 2005
C2004-905678-6

410'.92

Cover photos: Allen Bell
Photo on p. 1: Noam Chomsky
Photo on p. 31: Allen Bell

Printed and bound in Canada

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A Hated Political Enemy [2003]



In **Pirates & Emperors**, Noam Chomsky alludes to a letter from Elliott Abrams (then [Reagan-1986] Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs and for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs; now [Bush II-2003] Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Democracy, Human Rights, and International Operations at the National Security Council) that was sent “on official State Department stationery” to a small journal in the United Kingdom, *Index on Censorship*, that had published a three page article by Dr. Chomsky. Elliott Abrams refers to Noam Chomsky as “a fanatical defender of the PLO who has set new standards for intellectual dishonesty and personal vindictiveness in his writings about the Middle East” and he chastises *Index on Censorship* because “I therefore find it inexplicable that he is given fully three pages”. “Clearly giving him this much space lends a certain respectability to his disreputable efforts.” He also asseverates, à la The New Yorker circa 2003, that “There really isn’t anyone left in the U.S. – without regard to politics – who takes Chomsky seriously in view of his astonishing record.” Noam Chomsky states that he will “treasure” Elliott Abrams’ letter because “the reactions of the commissars often indicate that one is on the right course.” “But beyond that . . . not even the tiniest opening must be allowed to unacceptable thought.”-- Well, I want to appropriate the term ‘treasure’ because interviewing Dr. Chomsky in his office at MIT on May 9 and September 11, 2003, was a great honour and privilege, and a memory I will treasure. And I will treasure the picture that Dr. Chomsky took of me, the only photo taken by Noam Chomsky in existence because, as he told me, this was the first time he’d ever used a camera. I’ll just mention, en passant, that the photos I took of Dr. Chomsky, which I also very much treasure, were the first that I’d ever taken, and I want to thank my friend Lynda for lending me her camera and showing me how to use same. Finally, I suppose it’s at least marginally paradoxical that the photographic efforts of two novices (a somewhat generous designation) should have become part of this book.

I've been following, with much dismay, what's been happening to the Canadian media. It is really ominous. I've also seen some of how it works first-hand at Hamilton Ontario last fall. The article is disgusting of course, but the chances that they'd permit me to respond are about on a par with being hit by lightning, and if they did, it would be rewritten in a way to make it worse than silence. That's how these people operate. I have plenty of experience.

Noam Chomsky

My puppet
flowing yellow
hangs in
the window
and laughs
and dances
when he sees
my strings.

My puppet
flowing yellow
hangs in
the window
and laughs
when he sees
my strings.

Dancing yellow
puppet hangs
from red
strings.

Dignified he
waits among
plants & pictures
for someone
to give him
life.

Pretty puppet
knows you
intimately.

Allen Bell

A HATED POLITICAL ENEMY

Allen Bell interviews Noam Chomsky

Dr. Chomsky, I'd like to begin this interview with an epistolary allusion – an excerpt from your response to a letter I wrote you:

I've been following, with much dismay, what's been happening to the Canadian media. It is really ominous.

What, in your view, has been happening to the Canadian media, and why do you use the term 'ominous'?

Noam Chomsky:

Well, I don't publish about it because I don't have enough information so a personal letter is a personal letter. I'm giving you my impressions and they're scattered impressions, but my impression is that over the years the Canadian media have become less open, more restrictive, probably more corporatized – there's exceptions, there are things that do appear that didn't appear before – and then of course there's massive corporate takeover, by CanWest Global I guess it is, who are forcing editorials on the papers and cutting down content – there have been a lot of objections from journalists – and that really is ominous. I mean if the press gets taken over by a couple of corporate magnets – Conrad Black, Israel Asper, a couple of other guys, then it really is bad news. Independent media are critically important for a democratic society. If you eliminate the independent media you undercut the functioning of the democratic society. Which is, of course, the purpose.

Allen Bell:

In the February 15/03 edition of The Toronto Globe and Mail, there is a book review entitled 'Who Loves You Noam Chomsky'. At one point the reviewer says that he is one of "those . . . who locate ourselves in the traditionally liberal-to-social democratic range of the political spectrum" whereas your "depiction of the American empire as the fount of all evil seems too extreme." What is the import of this characterization?

Noam Chomsky:

Well, I quite agree with him that it's too extreme, in fact it's ludicrous, and he certainly knows it's ludicrous, and that's why he doesn't give a citation because there couldn't possibly be a citation. So the convention of what he calls his sector of opinion, liberal social-democrat opinion, is that

you're supposed to act like a Stalinist Commissar. If you have a political enemy you don't deal with their arguments and evidence, you just defame. So you invent lunatic positions and you attribute those positions to them and then you say well these positions are too extreme. But a serious journalist or reviewer who said anything like that would give a reference. Here's where he said that the American empire is the fount of all evil. Well since he knows that there can't conceivably be a reference, he just uses it for character assassination. That's pretty par. Actually I should say that the difference between The Globe and Mail and any American newspaper is that they wouldn't even run the review.

Allen Bell:

He goes on to say, “. . . there seems to be a missing distinction between suicide bombers and imperial policy. Chomsky, in short, is too uncompromising, relentless, mirthless.” What does he mean there seems to be a missing distinction between imperial policy and suicide bombers?

Noam Chomsky:

There's certainly a difference. Suicide bombers murder people and imperial violence murders vastly more people. There's a large difference.

Allen Bell”

“[T]he American empire as the fount of all evil” is a variant of the term ‘anti-American’. Is this not a term that comes right out of the lexicon of totalitarianism?

Noam Chomsky:

That's exactly where it comes from. It's not used with regard to any democratic society. I mean if somebody criticizes Berlusconi's foreign policy they're not called anti-Italian. If

you condemned them as anti-Italian in Rome or Milan you'd be ridiculed. But in societies like the old Soviet Union, for example – totalitarian societies – anti-Sovietism was a crime. That was the worst crime. If a dissident was anti-Soviet, then he was a criminal. And if you identify the state – state power – with the society, the culture, or the people, then the concept makes sense. Then if you criticize state power you are against the society and the culture and the people. But if you don't make that totalitarian assumption then it's utter nonsense. As far as I know it's used only with regard to the United States.

Allen Bell:

Why has this term taken on the guise of an argument?

Noam Chomsky:

Because what it reflects is the deeply totalitarian commitments of the people who use it. I mean there is such a thing as anti-Americanism. There are people who won't read American novels. They hate every aspect of American culture. But that's so marginal. Not worth talking about. But for people who criticize state policy decisions or corporate governance or other institutional factors – to regard them as opposed to the society and the people is a totalitarian concept. They're the ones who have respect and hope for the society and the people. It's understood with regard to every country except the United States, the Soviet Union, and I suspect the neo-Nazi military dictators in Brazil may have had a concept of anti-Brazilian which was like that. Among anyone who has any conception of or interest in democracy and freedom it's just ridiculous.

Allen Bell:

Similarly, in a recent article in The New Yorker [March31/03],

we're informed that "Chomsky long ago became alienated from the American political center, elsewhere in the world he is a superstar." What does The New Yorker mean by the American political center?

Noam Chomsky:

Well, that's not an article. That's an exercise in character assassination against a hated political enemy. That's why there is hardly a sentence in it that's verifiable. Part of the scheme there is to say well, you know, these crazy people elsewhere are coming to talks of mine. But in the United States nobody would pay attention. The reporter and the editor know perfectly well that when I give a talk in the United States there's ten times as many people as when I give a talk anywhere else. I can't – I probably spend an hour every night just turning down invitations from the United States. But you can't say that. Okay, so let's talk about the one part of that statement that looks factual: alienated from the political center. That presupposes that there was a time when I was somehow interacting with the political center. But when was that time? There's an interesting background here which is part of contemporary ideology. It works somehow like this: in the 1960s there was opposition to the war. Elite intellectuals were not part of it. They were outside of it. There's marginal exceptions but overwhelmingly they hated the opposition and they vilified the people who participated, like me, and much worse than today. In January, 1968 – you can time it exactly – the Tet offensive took place and it demonstrated that the war was not going to be won easily. It's going to be a long drawn out war. At that point the business world turned against the war and they basically ordered Lyndon Johnson not to run for office. About a year later – shortly after that – the mainstream of the intellectuals turned against it and they suddenly revealed themselves to have been long time opponents of the war. We

always recognized that we have to get out. I once wrote a comparison of what the Kennedy memoirists wrote before and after this event. They completely revised their stories about the Kennedy administration and turned Kennedy into a dove who wanted to get out and so on, but this was across the board – if you walked through the streets of Cambridge, everybody was a long time opponent of the war. Then came the next step. We're now all going to make friends. We all recognize that the war was a mistake – benign efforts to do good which went astray. Now we can put all that behind us and we'll go on and continue on our path of nobility. The people he's talking about, what he calls liberals and social democrats, went along with this. But there were people who didn't go along – like me.

Allen Bell:

Also an adjectival commentary prefaced by “it has been said”: “Chomsky’s thinking has grown simplistic and rigid”, “he is stuck in the past”. And then an interesting non sequitur: “When his book about the September 11th attacks, ‘9-11’, became a best seller, many people were shocked.” The nebulous “many people”. Is there a subtext in The New Yorker resorting to ad hominem language to this extent?

Noam Chomsky:

Sure there is. They are loyal to power. But it's a part of the same story. I mean what is simplistic and rigid is what they were calling simplistic and rigid in 1967. Then came the brief period when you were supposed to say okay it was a mistake and it's all over. And if you continue to give a critical analysis of US institutions and policies and so on that's simplistic and rigid because you're supposed to go along with it now. Now they can't give an argument –as you've noticed there's no argument – so what you do is denounce. You pretend that

there was a time when there wasn't what they call simplistic and rigid. Well just have a look and see what the interactions were like in the 60s. Harsher than today. Now it's more open than it was then. What about "stuck in the past"? Yes. That is believing that things that happened before yesterday matter. And you're not allowed to do that because there's a doctrine called 'change of course'. You're supposed to take the position that well in the past we did some bad things by mistake, but now it's all over. So now we're going to be wonderful. This doctrine is invoked about every year or two. But there are some people who are stuck in the past. Who insist that history isn't bunk. Of course, we're all stuck in the past when we talk about someone else. If you talk about Saddam Hussein you can talk about how awful he was when he gassed the Kurds. But you're not allowed to be stuck in the past with regard to the United States. The assumption is our leaders are really angelic just like we are. Paths of glory. And maybe they made a mistake in the past but only people who are rigid and simplistic will pay any attention to that. And if you can't answer them, then people who don't go along have to be vilified.

Allen Bell:

The New Yorker also points out that Christopher Hitchens or Hitchens

Noam Chomsky:

Hitchens.

Allen Bell:

He has had what The New Yorker calls "a political change of heart" and so he is now an authority to be quoted. You may not be cognizant of this but you have undergone a hell of a metamorphosis – from 'exemplary' to 'utter lunacy'.

“I thought he was an exemplary man But ‘silent genocide’ in Afghanistan!” Exclamation mark. “Now that is the gleam of utter lunacy piercing through.”

Noam Chomsky:

Did you look at the actual quote? The quote was at a time when the New York Times was reporting that the number of people threatened by starvation in Afghanistan has increased from 5 million to 7.5 million as a result of first the threat of bombing and then the initiation of bombing. It was at a time when every aid agency was saying you’re risking the severe threat of starvation for millions of people, when Harvard’s main journal, *International Security*, after I wrote that, had an article by their Afghan specialist saying there’s a grave threat of starvation as a result of the bombing – if you look at what I actually said: if they carry that out they could be carrying out a policy of silent genocide.

Allen Bell:

Why do people enjoy bombarding you with ad hominem language?

Noam Chomsky:

You can guess. See they’re not going to bombard the Harvard journal *International Security*. That won’t work. You can’t bombard the aid agencies. So what you do is you pick a political enemy who says the same thing and you direct an ad hominem attack against them. You don’t say what’s wrong, because it wasn’t wrong; it was right. They were threatening that and risking it in fact. You evaluate actions on the basis of the range of possible consequences. So, for example, when Khrushchev put missiles in Cuba, all of us regard that as criminal lunacy because it might have brought about a nuclear war. It didn’t bring about a nuclear war so do we therefore praise it for its magnificence,

do we condemn the people who warned that it might lead to a nuclear war. Because for others we understand the moral truism that you evaluate what they do on the basis of the range of possible consequences, but for us you're not allowed to apply truisms. And there's a good reason for that. If you apply truisms to ourselves, you're going to get some rather ugly consequences. So therefore we have to be totally immoral and totally irrational when we talk about ourselves. That's a defense mechanism.

Allen Bell:

You have written FATEFUL TRIANGLE, a remarkably detailed and comprehensive analysis of the American-Israeli axis – Edward Said referred to this book as the work of a noble mind – and you have written TURNING THE TIDE, another major work, again illuminating scholarship – to cite just two of your books. Yet when one looks at the book review in The Toronto Globe and Mail and the 16 page diatribe in The New Yorker – I guess my question is: why isn't there anything remotely resembling intellectual decency?

Noam Chomsky:

The question is: is there anything resembling fact and argument? Is there a verifiable statement? Is there a statement that's not taken ridiculously out of context like the one you describe? Not very often, and the reason is the same reason why, if you had read Pravda 20 years ago talking about Soviet dissidents, would you expect them to meet intellectual and moral standards? No. The purpose is to discredit political enemies by character assassination. It's typical of that spectrum of opinion. If you can't deal with arguments and evidence, and you don't have the power to throw the people in jail as they probably wish they did, then what you do is vilify them. So it's expected. And it hasn't been any different in the

past. You should see the way Bertrand Russell was treated. He was an object of hatred and contempt because he was doing some decent, honest things. That's intolerable.

Allen Bell:

In 'The Race To Destruction' chapter of TURNING THE TIDE, you state that "It is difficult to imagine a system better designed for the benefit of the privileged than the military system." How does this relate to what the Americans are doing to Iraq?

Noam Chomsky:

Well I don't exactly recall the context but I suspect I was talking about the domestic economy. The military system has several functions. One is to control the world. But there's another function which is very significant and rarely discussed. I wouldn't be surprised if that's the context. And that is to maintain the economy. If you look at what's called the new economy – the advanced sectors of the economy like computers, and electronics generally, telecommunications, the internet, automation, and so on and so forth – where did they come from? They came from places like MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] – they pay my salary – under the cover of military spending to socialize the costs and risks of research and development. It's costly, risky. So you socialize that. And then, after it gets to the point where it's marketable, you put it into the hands of private power. That's why IBM is producing computers and not typewriters. They have their fingers in the military run programs at the research centers in places like MIT. That's what these institutions are for and that's the way the economy runs. So yes the military system has been the basic backbone of the development of high technology industry. And many other sectors of the economy. So take what's called civil aviation. Many of these planes are modified bombers. The avionics, the metallurgy, the hard research, is usually done under

a military cover. And then adapted to private commercial gain. Quite apart from the infrastructure – the airports and everything else. That’s the way the public pays the costs, and you privatize the benefits. Aircraft extends enormously. It also leads to the biggest service industry, namely tourism. Trace all these things back and you find that quite typically they go back to the dynamic state sector of the economy and a lot of it is under military pretext. So quite apart from the task of controlling the world, there’s the task of maintaining what amounts to a state capitalist economy by socializing risk and cost and privatizing profit.-- Iraq is a different story. The New York Times rather honestly called Iraq the Petri dish test case for the new doctrine announced in the National Security strategy which basically comes down to a dismantling of international law and institutions and a very brazen announcement that the US intends to dominate the world by force and to do so indefinitely and to destroy any potential challenge to its dominance. That has precedents but no precedent that I know of as a statement of national policy except for cases we’d rather not think about. Which is why it caused plenty of shudders in the foreign policy elite here as well as around the world. And Iraq was a test case that shows how it’s done. Why Iraq? Well, you pick a country that’s first of all defenceless – you don’t want to attack anybody that can defend themselves, that would be ridiculous – and also worth controlling. No point in attacking Burundi which is also defenceless but who wants it. On the other hand, Iraq had the great advantage of being both defenceless and disarmed, and also very valuable. It’s got the second largest energy reserves in the world. With the United States firmly implanted right in the middle of the energy producing center of the world, it increases enormously the leverage for global control. So Iraq was a perfect test case for the military.

Allen Bell:

Even in the Toronto Globe and Mail, there were a number of allusions to what one columnist called “this war’s grotesque disproportion of military strength.” He talks about “shattered bodies and burned out vehicles” and says “Perhaps not since European armies fired their cannons on North American native people has a military balance been so enormous”.

Noam Chomsky:

That’s deep in our culture. It’s deep in our culture that the task of the enlightened Europeans, of whom we are the descendants, is to smash the natives in the face with overwhelming power and to control them – for their own good of course. Always for their own good.

Allen Bell:

What’s interesting about this article, and tonally it’s the norm, is that there is no moral revulsion whatsoever. In fact, it’s almost a celebration of American military might and the paucity of American casualties – “In the skies, the war has been more lopsided. After 20,000 combat sorties not a single U.S. or British warplane has been brought down.” The headline is: “U.S. troops at the gates of Baghdad silence war’s naysayers.”

Noam Chomsky:

That’s an interesting point. There was a debate about the war. The debate was between the naysayers who said it would be too costly, and there were the optimists – the hawks – who said it’s going to be easy. So there were the hawks and the doves. The hawks say we’ll get away with it. The doves say well, you know, it may not be that easy. And that’s the debate. If you go back to Nazi Germany, there were also hawks and doves. The hawks said look we can conquer Europe with no problem – two front war, etc. There were the doves who said well you

know we'll get in trouble if we fight a two front war. That was a debate and it really took place. After Stalingrad the German generals were mostly doves. We probably won't get away with it. But the question is it the right thing to do, that's not part of the debate. It's just how costly is it going to be to us.

Allen Bell:

At what point does one say what the hell is going on? You're celebrating cowardice and criminality.

Noam Chomsky:

Then you get Christopher Hitchens saying you're insane. Because the only topics you're allowed to discuss are the ones you were allowed to discuss in Nazi Germany or in the Soviet Union. Are we going to get away with it or aren't we.

Allen Bell:

'Are we going to get away with it?' was the question that was posed with respect to the American invasion of South Vietnam.

Noam Chomsky:

It's the same with Vietnam. We've had 40 years of Vietnam. The New Yorker says I was once near the political center. Never. Because the only debate allowed was between what they call hawks and doves. Are we going to win easily or is it going to be too costly. That was the debate and I was never part of that debate. So I was hated then and I'm still hated. I don't think the question is are we going to get away with it. The question is should we ever even do it.

Allen Bell:

Why do so few people within the United States give a damn?

Noam Chomsky:

That's not true. Not too few people. Few in the intellectual elite. If you look at American public opinion, by 1969 about 70% of the population described the war according to the polls as fundamentally wrong and intolerable – not a mistake. Virtually no intellectuals took that position. Certainly not the ones in the liberal social-democratic spectrum.

Allen Bell:

My question was also directed to the American invasion of Iraq.

Noam Chomsky:

Same thing. A majority of the population thought the US should have gotten a UN Security Council endorsement. There was a degree of support for the war higher than other countries. But you have to understand why. Starting last September when the security strategy was announced and the campaign began – the congressional political campaign – right at that time a massive government media propaganda campaign began depicting Saddam Hussein as an imminent threat to the security of the United States – as involved in September 11, as tied up with al-Qaeda, planning new atrocities, we've got to defend ourselves – and, if you look at the polls, right away – a couple of weeks – about 60% of the population regarded Saddam as a threat to the security of the United States. They didn't think that in Kuwait even. Nobody thought he was a threat to their security. They hated him but he's not a threat to anybody. Except within Iraq. But here it was a majority of the population. Pretty soon close to half the population, probably more, thought he was involved in September 11. A complete fabrication. But the propaganda worked. It was a spectacular achievement. They succeeded in frightening probably a majority of the population. And those attitudes are strongly correlated with support for the war – not surprisingly. If I believed those things, I'd support the war

too. In self-defense. But that's a marvellous propaganda achievement. And if you factor that out, opposition to the war here is probably the same as everywhere else.

Allen Bell:

Is there a latent, and perhaps not so latent, belief that what the Americans are doing to Iraq is in the economic interest of the populations of the Western democracies, and particularly the population of the United States, because stealing so much oil will bring down the price of oil, and therefore what the United States is doing is in our ultimate economic interest and is therefore ipso facto okay? And, also, if the United States is doing this, then the recipients of American violence are by definition 'the bad guys' and I guess by extension the bad women and children so on that level also what the Americans are doing is ipso facto okay.

Noam Chomsky:

First of all, the US is probably not intending to use the oil. The US has never really been much concerned with accessing the oil of the Middle East. It's concerned with controlling it. Which is something totally different. So since the Second World War a leading feature of policy has been to control the oil, not to use it. In fact, the US was and to an extent remains a major producer. But to control it. World control is a source of enormous wealth which doesn't flow into the pockets of the population. Rather the energy corporations and the construction companies and high tech industry and so on and so forth. The US is also not interested in lowering the price too far. Never has been. It wants the price kept within a certain range. Not too high because if it's too high it harms certain power interests and if it's too low it cuts into the profits that largely flow back to the United States. There's no reason to believe that it's helpful to the people of the United States anymore than

the British Empire was helpful to the people of England. Special interests but not the population. If you talked to a guy in the street and said you should do it because it's in our economic interest – I mean you might get that among the elites but that's not public opinion. Take a look at the propaganda. The propaganda does not say let's conquer Iraq because there will be more money in your pocket. The propaganda says let's conquer and occupy Iraq because it will save you from destruction by terrorists. And it will let in freedom and democracy. That's the way propaganda works. It never appeals to people's vulgar interests. And the reason is that the people who carry out the propaganda make the assumption that the general population is not like them. The general population is not a bunch of gangsters. They're decent, honest people so therefore you have to lie to them about threats to their security and your noble ideals. You have to make it attractive to the population in their terms. Which are usually moral and decent terms.

Allen Bell:

Apropos the second part of my question

Noam Chomsky:

There are remarkable things going on. Have a look at the May 7 edition of The New York Times. Not the internet edition but the hard copy edition on p.14. They have a wonderful chart of what they call the civil administration of Iraq. It has 16 different organizations-- 16 boxes: each of them with a bold-faced description of the task of this group. They're all either US military, US corporations – there's one British general – and at the very bottom of the organization chart there's a tiny little box, the only one that has no bold-face, no task, that's the Iraqi advisors. That's the civil administration of Iraq. Even in the most vulgar days of colonialism they weren't this-- but they know they can get away with it. The person who's supposed

to be driving the pressure for democracy, really fighting for democracy, leading the crusade for democracy – Paul Wolfowitz – a few days ago he gave a talk that was reported in The New York Times in which he condemned-- bitter condemnation of the government of Turkey, and the reason is the government of Turkey took the position of 95% of their population and refused to allow US troops to operate from Turkey into Iraq. That's what 95% of the population wanted and the government adhered to that position. So he bitterly condemns them and he goes on to condemn the military – the Turkish military – because we all know they're just behind the scenes and if they want to overthrow the government and control things, they can always do it. He condemned the military for weakness because they allowed the government to respond to the will of 95% of the population and he ordered Turkey to apologize for this – you'd better understand, you'd better apologize. Apologize for being democratic and not carrying out a military coup. And understand that you've got to help America. This is the man who is leading the crusade for democracy and freedom in Iraq. Are you going to see a comment about this? No.

Allen Bell:

One of the ways in which oppressors justify the treatment of their victims is by dehumanizing them. This is what the Germans did ("untermenschen"). This is what the Americans did re the Vietnamese ("gooks") in the context of their own genocidal modus operandi, and this is what the Israelis are doing to the Palestinians. In fact, the more horrendous the oppression and victimization, the greater the dehumanization. Do you see this happening vis-à-vis the Americans and the Iraqis?

Noam Chomsky:

Not if the Iraqis accept what we call democracy which means help America.

Allen Bell:

Wolfowitz was talking to a senate committee or congressional committee – some committee – and he said France has become a problem. Something has to be done about France. But that can wait till later. Is France code for Europe?

Noam Chomsky:

France is code for France and Germany which are the industrial and financial centers of Europe, and there's always been a concern in US policy since the 2nd World War that Europe might strike off on its own – become an independent force in world affairs. Europe used to be called a potential third force during the Cold War, and the US has always been ambivalent about that. It's been in favour of European unification but not if Europe becomes too independent. So thirty years ago, 1973, it was called The Year of Europe, celebrating European emergence from the trials of the 2nd World War and so on. And Henry Kissinger gave a speech called The Year of Europe address, in which he warned the Europeans to remember that they have what he called regional responsibilities within the overall framework of order managed by the United States, and Europe's got to remember that. And, of course, they might not. Europe is an economic power on a par with the US, also a higher educational level. In every respect except military it's a comparable or maybe even a bigger force, so it could go off on its own. And Europe means France and Germany, whatever they bring, because that's the center. That's what lies behind this infantile old Europe-new Europe business. That was the fad a couple of months ago – Rumsfeld and others. Old Europe are the bad guys. France and Germany. New Europe are the good guys. The former Communist satellites and Italy and Spain which are going to be on our side. Of course, not the people. The people in those countries were even more opposed to US policy than they were in old Europe. But since all of these guys – Wolfowitz, Rumsfeld, and the rest – have a passionate hatred

for democracy, as do all the commentators, they let this pass. So old Europe were the countries where the governments were taking the position of the majority of the population, and new Europe, the good guys, were the countries where the leadership was overruling an even larger part of the population, but that makes them good guys because they were taking their orders from Crawford, Texas. And also the idea is that working for the United States they'll prevent the European heartland from moving off in an independent direction. So, yeah, France is a problem, Germany is a problem, because they're just too big and powerful.

Allen Bell:

Dr. Chomsky, a term that appears to be very much in vogue is 'reconstruction'. In fact, whenever Bush II and his British marionette went to one of their hideaways, the media informed us that they were talking about 'reconstruction', i.e., what contracts would go to what companies. It's as though it's perfectly justifiable to destroy a country, with who knows what long range consequences, slaughter and injure its inhabitants, steal its resources – in this case Iraq's oil reserves, the second largest in the world – because after all this devastation there will be reconstruction. Again, at what point does moral revulsion seep into the consciousness of North Americans? At what point does one finally say the Emperor has no clothes?

Noam Chomsky:

That's for you to decide.

Allen Bell:

What is your response?

Noam Chomsky:

There's another point to remember. The costs of the destruction

and the reconstruction are coming out of the same pockets, namely the American taxpayers. I mean Bechtel and Halliburton and Lockheed and so on may be laughing all the way to the bank, but somebody is paying for it. The same people.

Allen Bell:

Is there a perceived ideological threat to Western hegemony, and is this why, or at least partially why, the Islamic world has been demonized to such an extent and there has been such a homicidal American backlash?

Noam Chomsky:

I don't think there's a threat from Islam to Western hegemony. But there's a growing threat, if that is the right word, from Asia, particularly Northeast Asia, the most dynamic economic region of the world, which might over time resume the position at the center of the global economy that it held until into the 18th century. The Islamic world is of interest and concern primarily because of its resources, specifically oil, not its threat to hegemony. And I don't think it's quite right to say it's being demonized. The largest Islamic state is Indonesia. Australia, the major outpost of the West in the region, is moving towards restoring close military ties with Indonesia, including ties with the worst killers, the Kopassus special forces troops. The US may well do the same, and relations remain close in other dimensions. With regard to the Middle East, the US and the West retain close relations to ruling elites, particularly those who manage the world's largest reserves of energy. The backlash should be regarded as in large part a recognition of an opportunity to consolidate more fully US control of this enormous material wealth.

Allen Bell:

The Canadian Prime Minister, in an unguarded moment, said "Who's next?" Is there a 'hit list'? To put the question another

way, are you of the opinion that the destruction of Iraq and the looting of its enormous oil reserves is a prolegomenon to other ventures?

Noam Chomsky:

Depends on how it works out. I mean greatly to my surprise, I must say I'm shocked at this, they're having trouble. I thought it would be a walkover. To fail to take control of Iraq and make it a viable society – that takes real talent. Just think of the situation they're going into. I mean here was a country that was virtually devastated by sanctions. The sanctions are over. It was destroyed by war. The wars are over. It was being ruled by a brutal tyrant. Bad as the US facade may be it's not going to be that. How can you fail? There is some resistance. It's getting no support from outside. I mean compare it with other military occupations. Take the Nazis in Europe. They ran Europe with collaborators without much trouble. Every country had its collaborators that ran things for them pretty efficiently. There was a resistance but if it hadn't been supported from abroad they would have crushed it instantly. And they were under attack. Or take the Russians in Eastern Europe. They ran it without much trouble with collaborators all over the place. How come the US can't do it under the most optimal circumstances? If they had been able to do it, which is what they expected and what I expected – I can't understand the failure – then, yes, they would have gone on to other things. Now they're in trouble. It's costing them too much. They can't pay for it. The army is starting to erode. It may get harder to go on to the next one. But it does reflect extraordinary incompetence.

Allen Bell:

Mikhail Alexandrovitch Bakunin in *STATISM AND ANARCHY* uses the term 'policy of aggression' in reference to states that have a penchant for violence. Are people in other countries –

in fact, is the rest of the world – beginning to see the United States as a somewhat crazed Superpower careering more and more out of control?

Noam Chomsky:

Not just now. But it's been true for quite awhile. And its been troubling quite conservative political analysts. Take say Samuel Huntington at Harvard, a well known very mainstream political scientist, highly respected. Back in the Clinton years he wrote in Foreign Affairs, the main establishment journal, that much of the world now regards the United States as a rogue superpower and the greatest external threat to the existence of their societies. That's Clinton. Sure the world is worried about it and in the last couple of months its been remarkable. Fear of the United States is mounting all over the world. It's huge. Its gone up enormously since the Bush administration. Actually a poll reported, some poll which was done in connection with 9/11 I guess – the Times or the Post, a couple of days ago – that attitudes have changed over the last year. And they've changed from sympathy after 9/11 to real fear. And there was plenty of fear before.

Allen Bell:

A militarily omnipotent Superpower and a rogue state with a policy of aggression is not the most felicitous of combinations re the survivability of the species.

Noam Chomsky:

In fact it's a great threat. If you look at both their military and economic plans it's quite frightening. The military plans are shocking. Just to mention one – this goes back to Clinton again – for the last four years or so, four or five years, the main UN disarmament commission has been paralyzed by a conflict between the United States and the rest of the world over militarization of space. I mean

every other country just about is trying to institute measures to prevent the militarization of space and the US is blocking them. There have been votes at the General Assembly reaffirming and strengthening the outer space treaty which bans the militarization of space. The US alone abstained – the US and Israel.. Same with the disarmament committee. And putting highly destructive weapons in space really does threaten survival. I mean nuclear weapons are bad enough but this could be much more dangerous. They're on high alert. There are likely to be accidents. Somebody is going to try and shoot them down. If survival was a high value nobody would be contemplating these things. But look if survival was a high value, policy also would not be directed towards destroying the environment. That's a tremendous threat. Nobody really knows the details but there are processes under way which it is feared by scientists may be what is called non linear – it means small changes can lead to huge consequences. And they could be devastating. Even for the temperate zones. But who cares? If you can make money, why worry?

Allen Bell:

Grand Guignol.

Noam Chomsky:

This is not the first time in history you know. Survival has often ranked rather low. Just think of wars. About half the time I suppose wars are lost by the people who started them. Often with devastating results.

Allen Bell:

With respect to the Superpower's capitalistic underpinnings, technology, of course, is capitalism's weapon, but technology is also capitalism's Achilles heel.

Noam Chomsky:

There's a book published by MIT Press, about five years ago, called AMERICA'S ACHILLES' HEEL which is about terrorist threats to the United States. Reasonably super high-tech, just using modern technology, and it's quite an impressive study of the dangers. This is remember well before 9/11. It's been known by specialists for some years that, with contemporary technology, the monopoly of violence in the hands of the rich and powerful is probably gone. It's now more balanced. They still have an overwhelming preponderance of the means of violence but they don't monopolize it anymore. That's what 9/11 showed as did the bombing of the World Trade Centre in 1993 which came pretty close to succeeding. People tend to forget that. That wasn't high-technology. That was explosives. The wealthy and the powerful no longer have the monopoly of violence that they had in the past and it's driving them up the wall. If you do these things to other people it's no big deal. But when they do it to us – it's not allowed. I mean take a look at 9/11 – look at the horrible atrocity, everyone in the world agreed with that. But if you look around the world, the reactions from much of the world were, yeah, a horrifying atrocity, but welcome to the club. You've been doing this to us for centuries.

Allen Bell:

Dr. Chomsky, the first book of yours that I read – which I very much enjoyed – was PROBLEMS OF KNOWLEDGE AND FREEDOM, the inaugural Bertrand Russell lectures that you gave at Trinity [Trinity College, Cambridge University]. And in your introduction you point out that Bertrand Russell was threatened with imprisonment

Noam Chomsky:

He was in prison.

Allen Bell:

Oh? I didn't know that. He was actually imprisoned?



Noam Chomsky:

During World War I. He was imprisoned for opposing the war. I mean he was a Lord; he was treated pretty nicely, probably rooms like this, but technically he was in prison.

Allen Bell:

In the introduction to PROBLEMS OF KNOWLEDGE AND FREEDOM you state that he was subjected to obloquy, harassment, suppression, distortion, and – I'll quote you directly – “the revilement by apologists for the criminal violence of the state.”

Noam Chomsky:

He was hated. He was despised. There's an interesting book about that if you're interested. There's a book called BERTRAND RUSSELL'S AMERICA published by South End Press which is about the way he was treated by the New York Times and others.

Allen Bell:

Is this not what we're seeing today, with respect to the war crime that has just been perpetrated, the culmination of twelve years of Draconian sanctions that have killed vastly more children than the cluster bombs, artillery, etc., of the Americans and the British – or the 'coalition' as the media likes to call them. One of these days if I had what Chaucer calls “tyme enough and space” I'd like to write a book on the pathology of language. You've already demonstrated that this is what The New Yorker's animadversions are all about. With respect to the world-wide protests against the American invasion, is this not also the corporate media's take on democracy – predictable contempt and dislike, but also an anger at the democratic process?

Noam Chomsky:

You're right. But I think – but my feeling is the most dramatic example of that is the old Europe-new Europe business. I mean I cannot think of an example of such brazen hatred of democracy. Just think what it meant. There's a very sharp criterion that distinguished the good guys from the bad guys. The bad guys are the countries where the governments took the same position as the overwhelming majority of the population. Germany and France are the bad guys because the governments took the same position as perhaps 70% of the population. Turkey is hated because the government took the same position as 95% of the population. Who are the good guys? Spain and Italy where opposition to the war was higher than in France and Germany. But they're the good guys because the governments disregarded 80% of the population. In the Eastern European satellites the populations are even more against the war than in France and Germany. But the leadership – good old-fashioned, plenty of background to this – they said, yeah, we'll go along. In fact, it was the former Foreign Minister of Latvia who was asked – I think in the Wall Street Journal – why they went along with the United States, and he said something like 'well we know you have to say Yes Sir'. So they're the good guys. And it wasn't just Wolfowitz and Rumsfeld. That was all the commentary. All the commentators -- what's wrong with the French? What's wrong with the Germans? What's the matter with the Turks? How come the governments don't disregard 95% of the population and do what we tell them? How can you have a deeper contempt for democracy than that? You find that in Stalin's Russia. And it passes without comment because it's so internalized. It's so deeply internalized that what they're supposed to do is take orders from us.

Allen Bell:

If Bertrand Russell were alive today can one at least surmise that he would consider Bush II – and for that matter Bush I – Rumsfeld, Perle, Wolfowitz, Blair, Powell, Rice, Cheney, etc., to be war criminals?

Noam Chomsky:

I take that for granted but I can't speak for the dead.

Allen Bell:

In my book, PUPPET POEMS, which is only available in Canada – my publisher doesn't have an American or European distributor – there is a poem entitled 'Ceausescu'. Ceausescu was certainly in Saddam Hussein's league but he was overthrown from within. Do you agree that had Saddam Hussein been overthrown from within, the weapons of mass destruction canard may not have washed, and this may have negated, to some extent at least, the public pretext for the invasion?

Noam Chomsky:

Ceausescu was overthrown from within. He was quite comparable to Saddam Hussein. The people who are now in office in Washington supported Ceausescu to the last minute. They supported him right to the end of his bloody rule. They now pretend that they helped in overthrowing him but take a look back. Furthermore the same thing probably would have happened to Saddam Hussein except for the sanctions agenda. I mean the sanctions devastated the society, strengthened the tyrant, and forced people to be dependent on him. He probably would have been overthrown. That's not the only case. There's a real rogues' gallery of people that they supported that were overthrown from within. Suharto, Marcos, Duvalier, Mobuto, you go down the list. Ceausescu is a striking case because US support for him was

so extreme. And because he was so similar to Saddam.

Allen Bell:

Do you agree that this may have negated to some extent the public pretext for the invasion?

Noam Chomsky:

They didn't want him overthrown from within. Because then Iraqis would have been in charge. In fact Bush practically announced that on the eve of the invasion. On the eve of the invasion there was a summit meeting in the Azores with Bush and Blair. And if you take a look at what they said, they said even if Saddam Hussein and his family leave Iraq we're going to invade anyway. Because we're not just interested in regime change. We're interested in putting in our regime, not one the Iraqis want.

Allen Bell:

Of course, there is one country in the Middle East that is violent and unstable and that does have weapons of mass destruction – after so many years Mordechai Vanunu is still in solitary confinement – lots of them, and that has vitiated, with America's support and assistance, as you point out in FATEFUL TRIANGLE and elsewhere, a plethora of UN resolutions.

Noam Chomsky:

Much more than Iraq. In fact Turkey and Morocco have violated more resolutions than Iraq. And in fact the leading – if we were serious about this suppose that Iraq had the veto. How many resolutions would it be in violation of? Zero. The most extreme form of violation of a resolution is the veto. Who's the champion of vetos? Washington. Does anybody ever mention that?

Allen Bell:

Why is there such a strong rapprochement between the state of Israel and the fundamentalist Born Again Christian movement in the United States?

Noam Chomsky:

That's too long a story.

Allen Bell:

Thank you Dr. Chomsky.

Noam Chomsky is Institute Professor (Department of Linguistics and Philosophy) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Among his publications:

Problems of Knowledge and Freedom
American Power and the New Mandarins
Towards a New Cold War
Rethinking Camelot
Aspects of the Theory of Syntax
Turning the Tide
Language and Mind
Sound Pattern in English (with Morris Halle)
Fateful Triangle
Pirates and Emperors
Necessary Illusions
Modular Approaches to the Study of the Mind
Current Issues in Linguistic Theory
Deterring Democracy
Essays on Form and Interpretation
For Reasons of State
Knowledge of Language
Logical Structure of Linguistic Theory
Manufacturing Consent (with Edward S. Herman)
On Power and Ideology
Reflections on Language
Syntactic Structures
Rules and Representations
Topics in the Theory of Generative Grammar
Washington Connection and Third World Fascism (with Edward S. Herman)
Profit Over People
Media Control
Year 501
Studies on Semantics in Generative Grammar
Cartesian Linguistics
New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind