

‘Masters of the Universe’ versus the World Social Forum

Noam Chomsky

*Noam Chomsky
explains the thinking
behind the Porto
Alegre World Social
Forum, which met
for the second time in
Brazil from 31
January to 5
February 2002, and
brought together
some 60,000
representatives from
social movements all
around the world*

*This is a compilation from
diverse e-mail, radio, and
journal interviews with
Noam Chomsky in the week
before the World Social
Forum.*

Why have you decided to participate in the World Social Forum? What do you think of it?

Noam Chomsky: Two meetings are taking place pretty much at same time. One is the Davos meeting of ‘the masters of the universe,’ to borrow the term used by the world’s leading business journal, the London *Financial Times*, when they met a year ago. The term was presumably used with a touch of irony, but it is rather accurate. The second is the World Social Forum meeting in Porto Alegre, bringing together representatives of popular organizations throughout the world whose conception of what the world needs is rather different from that of the masters.

Neither group, of course, is popularly elected – a charge constantly levelled by the masters and their acolytes against the World Social Forum, but, obviously, far more applicable to the Davos group. In fact, it would be a misunderstanding to say that on these issues, there even exist ‘elected governments.’ The reason is that the issues are kept from the general public even in the most free and democratic societies, the United States for example.

Public opinion studies reveal that the general population is quite concerned with these issues, and largely opposed to the policies of the masters, which are supported with near unanimity by the corporate sector, the government, and the ideological institutions. The media are well aware of the popular opposition. The *Wall Street Journal*, for example, ruefully observed that opponents of the mislabelled free trade agreements have an ‘ultimate weapon’: the general population, which must therefore be kept in the dark. For the same reasons, the issues do not arise in the political arena. But of the parts of the global public that have become informed through popular organizations, labour unions, peasant organizations, independent media, and other means, it is a reasonable guess that the World

Social Forum represents a rather broad sample.

So in answer to your question, I am delighted to have the opportunity to attend.

As for what I think of it – in my opinion, hopes for a decent future lie very substantially in the hands of those who will be gathered at Porto Alegre and others like them.

Porto Alegre Forum likes to say that it is an anti-Davos event. Don't you think that the problem is all this polarity? Is the way to combat the so-called 'unique thought' to propose an 'opposed unique thought'? Do you really think that the demands of the Porto Alegre Forum – forgiveness of debts, less agricultural protectionism, etc – are enough to finish underdevelopment?

Noam Chomsky: To say that the Porto Alegre Forum is 'anti-Davos' is to presuppose that somehow Davos is prima facie legitimate and that popular opposition to what it represents requires some special justification. If one chooses to frame the matter in these terms – I do not – it would be more reasonable to say that Davos is 'anti-Porto Alegre,' and to ask why the Davos gathering even has the right to take place.

Davos is a gathering of those whom the international business press, with only a touch of irony, calls 'the masters of the universe.'

Porto Alegre is a gathering of popular organizations from around the world whose picture of how society should be organized is different from that of the masters.

Such confrontations are major themes of history. And fortunately, popular forces have won many victories over the centuries, overcoming illegitimate and unaccountable concentrations of power, such as those gathered in Davos. They of course pretend to represent democratically-elected governments, but that is such a transparent absurdity that I presume we need waste no time on it, particularly with regard to neo-liberal globalisation.

Whether the programmes of those gathered at the World Social Forum will make significant inroads into the serious problems of global society – of which 'underdevelopment' is only one – depends on what falls under the term 'etc.' in the question. Surely it should go far beyond the two examples mentioned, important as they are.

Do you see this movement as a new sort of 'International' of the left, liberal and progressive forces of the world society? In that sense, should it have a programme?

Noam Chomsky: The traditional goal of the left since its modern origins has been to bring about a form of globalisation that is rooted in participation of the great mass of the population of the world, and that, accordingly, will be responsive to their interests and concerns – diverse, complex, often unclear, to be explored in a creative and experimental spirit: an 'international,' in short. There were preliminary efforts from the 19th century, either terminated, or distorted by brutal state power or other factors.

The World Social Forum has the promise to become the first really significant

manifestation of such globalisation from the bottom, a very welcome prospect, with enormous promise. As for a programme, there is a measure of shared understanding and perspective. Programmes have been formulated in earlier meetings, and have led to cooperative action. Just how specific a programme should be leads us back to the earlier question.

Why should the hegemonic power be worried about the World Social Forum and this kind of movement? Does it have a real chance of challenging the financial and multinational corporations power?

Noam Chomsky: The hegemonic power, and the ‘masters of the universe’ generally, are greatly concerned about the World Social Forum and the forces it represents, and about what they call ‘anti-globalisation movements,’ a term of propaganda that we should avoid. That is why there is such a constant drumbeat of articles condemning these movements. It is also the reason why international economic agreements are negotiated largely in secret, and rarely reported in any detail.

Consider as an example the Quebec Summit of the Americas last April, which was to endorse the ‘Free Trade Area of the Americas.’ We know from polls that the issues are of great concern to the public, but the issues, and the forthcoming Summit and the Free Trade Area of the Americas, were kept carefully out of the electoral arena in November 2000. They also received virtually no media attention beforehand.

At the Summit itself, coverage was mostly meaningless. It kept mainly to disruptions, along with great praise for the ringing endorsement of democracy and ‘transparency’ by the leaders who gathered at Quebec. Their commitment to these high ideals was illustrated not only by the suppression of the issues, but by the blackout of major studies by leading human rights and economic analysis organizations of the effects of the North American Free Trade Area, hailed as the model for the new Free Trade Area of the Americas. These were timed for release at the summit, and were on every news desk in the country. It’s a useful experiment to check the coverage (don’t bother; it has been done and it was virtually zero). The silence and secrecy make good sense. The system of concentrated power is fragile, and knows it, and has to bend every effort to ensure that the ‘ultimate weapon’ is not unsheathed.

What kind of contribution can the World Social Forum give to this hope of a peaceful world?

Noam Chomsky: The United States intelligence agencies have recently published their projections for the coming years. They predict that ‘globalisation’ – meaning, the particular form of neo-liberal economic integration favoured by centres of power – will continue, leading to growing inequality and increased financial volatility (hence slower growth and dangerous chaos). Five years ago, the United States Space Command, which is in charge of the programmes to militarise space (including ‘missile defence’ as a small component), presented its public justification for these programmes. A prime concern is the growing gap

between 'haves' and 'have-nots' that they too anticipate as a consequence of the investor-rights version of 'globalisation.' They expect, reasonably, that the result will be turmoil among growing numbers of impoverished people throughout the world, who will have to be controlled by force. Hence the need to militarise space, providing the United States with immensely destructive weapons launched from space, probably nuclear-powered. Apart from the horrendous consequences for the victims, that is also a prescription for global disaster.

Against this background, the potential contribution of the World Social Forum to a peaceful world becomes quite clear.

The World Social Forum is a gathering of people of the world who are committed to reversing these dangerous and extremely threatening tendencies, focusing on the core problem – namely, the process of neo-liberal globalisation that is expected by its designers to have these and other ominous effects. Participants at the World Social Forum basically agree with the assessment of the intelligence agencies and military planners, but they represent people, not concentrated power, and therefore have different interests: their concern is decent survival for human beings, not increased concentration of power and profit with all that it entails, as the designers of the system themselves anticipate.

Returning to your question, the contribution of the World Social Forum is essential, and can be decisive.

Is it possible to organize the complex and diverse scenario of the so call anti-globalisation forces (in my articles, I like to depict them not as being in a struggle against globalisation, but against neo-liberal globalisation)?

Noam Chomsky: You are quite right to call them opponents of 'neo-liberal globalisation,' that is, of a particular form of international economic integration that the 'masters of the universe' have designed in their own interests, with the interests of the general population incidental. Not a great surprise; it would be surprising, and a sharp break from history as well as logic, if it were otherwise.

No one is opposed to 'globalisation' in the general sense. For example, participants in the World Social Forum are not opposed to the fact that it exists and that they are attending, a constructive illustration of globalisation.

You are also right to refer to the 'complex and diverse scenario.' That is as it should be. Many interests are represented, as they should be when people from South and North, from farms and factories, from all walks of life, young and old, come together to consider complex issues that are very important but often poorly understood – by anyone. How much organization there *should* be is an open question: it should not go beyond the level of common purpose and understanding. How much there *will* be is up to the participants to determine.

What is the difference between anti-Americanism and the struggle against globalisation? Can this be used by the United States to promote a new polarisation such as the one that resulted from the Cold War? Is there a way to detect and stop terrorism in anti-United States reactions?

Noam Chomsky: It is always important to look carefully at how questions are formulated, whether in the sciences or inquiry into human affairs. One often finds hidden assumptions that should be unearthed, critically analysed, and often rejected. When that essential preliminary task is undertaken, we often find that the questions cannot be answered, and should be recast.

I think that's true in this case. Take the concept 'anti-Americanism.' It is a rather curious one. Such concepts are typically used only in totalitarian states or military dictatorships. Thus 'anti-Sovietism' was a grave crime in the halls of the Kremlin in the old days, and I suppose the Brazilian generals and their supporters charged their internal enemies with being 'anti-Brazilian.'

In countries that have some respect for their freedom, the concept would be dismissed with ridicule. Imagine the reaction in the streets of Milan or Rome to a book called 'anti-Italianism.' And then observe the actual reaction in the United States and Britain to a book by a respected author called 'anti-Americanism' – a scholar who specializes in the Soviet Union, incidentally, and therefore understands very well the model he is following. No one should be surprised to discover that the book is a deceitful rant against those who fail to worship the Holy State with sufficient ardour, and that it is for that reason that it is highly praised in sober reviews in the *New York Times* and elsewhere.

Those who criticized the crimes of the Kremlin or the Brazilian generals were not 'anti-Russian' or 'anti-Brazilian,' surely. And by the same token, those who oppose crimes of the most powerful state in the world are not anti-American; in fact, the crimes are often strenuously opposed by a considerable majority of the population. The term should be abandoned, as in the case of its ugly models.

Consider next 'the struggle against globalisation.' I know of no such struggle.

The participants in the Porto Alegre World Social Forum, for example, are not opposed to the fact that they are able to attend, thanks to international integration, that is, globalisation. The First International did not oppose globalisation: that was its highest goal, as its name indicates. Globalisation in itself is supported or opposed by no one. The question is: what kind of globalisation? Like others, the term 'globalisation' has been appropriated by the powerful as an ideological weapon. They want it to be used to refer to a specific form of international economic integration, designed in the interests of investors and financial institutions. They can then condemn critics of their projects as 'anti-globalisation,' primitives who want to return to the stone age. No one should tolerate such deceitful practices.

Going back to the question, it cannot be formulated, and hence cannot be answered, because it is framed in conventional terminology, which is crafted to ensure that only inappropriate answers can be given.

Translating the question to more appropriate terms, it should be transparent that the popular struggles against this particular form of international integration cannot possibly be understood to be 'anti-American,' where the term 'American' refers to the people of the United States. One simple reason is that it is opposed by the majority of the American population, which is why negotiations have to

be carried on behind closed doors, the issues do not arise in elections, and the media and journals have to hold a 'veil of secrecy' over what they know.

As for polarization, power centres in the United States and their associates elsewhere do not want it: rather they want submission. But if those opposed to them do not submit, they will of course seek to vilify and punish them, leading to polarization. There is nothing new or surprising about that.

On prevention of terrorism, it is an important task, whether it is the terrorism of the weak or of the strong, which, not surprisingly, is far more lethal and destructive. Of course, the powerful will seek to restrict the concept so that it applies only to terror against them, excluding the far worse terrorism they carry out against others. If we submit to their efforts, we will ask only how terror directed against the rich and powerful should be detected and stopped. But we have fallen into a trap in the first step.

Some months after the first edition of the World Social Forum, last year, President Fernando Henrique Cardoso has defended the creation of a tax over the financial transfers around the world. This was originally a proposal of ATTAC, one of the non-governmental organisations that organises the World Social Forum. Also last year, a French Parliament member congratulated Fernando Henrique for the Social Forum, even though the President had nothing to do with the event. Do you believe that the discussions of the Forum can change the mind of the men in power or at least influence their acts?

Noam Chomsky: The proposal goes back many years; in fact, with many variants. The best-known proposals of the kind you mention are those of Nobel laureate James Tobin, about 30 years ago, though John Maynard Keynes had made similar suggestions for a tax on financial transfers long before. The issue became of great importance with the dismantling of the Bretton Woods system in the 1970s, leading to an astronomical increase in very short-term financial transactions, a development that many economists regard as a primary reason for the general deterioration of the global economy during the 'neo-liberal' period of the past 25 years; John Eatwell and Lance Taylor in a recent book, to mention one example.

As for the World Social Forum, it is an outgrowth of many years of popular resistance to the specific form of investor-rights 'globalisation' that has been imposed on much of the world in the past several decades. Protest and resistance have been located mostly in the South, including prominently Brazil. In recent years they have extended to the industrial countries as well, and important international alliances have been formed, a very promising development.

There has certainly been an influence on the rhetoric of dominant power centres, and to an extent, on their practice. Even totalitarian regimes and military dictatorship have to respond, to some extent, to popular mood. That is far more true of more free and democratic systems. But the goal should not be just to induce the powerful to be less harsh. Rather, it should be to dismantle concentrations of illegitimate power. That has been a leading theme of history for many centuries, fortunately, and it has by no means run its course.

You say that people's thoughts are controlled by media. Don't you think that the events of the Social Forum and Seattle, with the mobilization of thousands of people, are a proof that people are capable to make up their own minds independently?

Noam Chomsky: I have never said, and I do not believe, that people's thoughts are controlled by the media. On the contrary, I have often discussed major issues on which the public is opposed to the policies that are given near-unanimous support by the corporate and state media. Naturally, these media, and other doctrinal institutions, seek 'to control the public mind,' to borrow the words of their leaders. That is not even in doubt, at least among serious people. But they often fail, quite dramatically so in fact. In such cases, policies have to be enacted in secret, as is very common. And the systems of power are often quite frank about it.

Consider, for example, the international economic arrangements that are misleadingly called 'free trade agreements.' They receive near-unanimous elite support, but as the *Wall Street Journal* lamented, opponents have an 'ultimate weapon': the public remains opposed. Therefore they have to be conducted largely in secret, and the issues do not arise in elections. Anyone who has examined declassified government documents carefully knows that a great deal of what is kept secret, the great majority of it in fact, has nothing to do with national security. The goal is not to prevent enemies from knowing what is recorded; rather, to keep it from the domestic population, who are unlikely to tolerate what is being done in their name if they know about it. The same is true of 'clandestine operations,' such as the extraordinary clandestine international terror network that the Reagan administration created to fight its 'war against terrorism.' At first, the administration sought to follow the model of the Kennedy administration, carrying out its wars in Central America quite openly, as Kennedy did in South Vietnam. But they quickly realized that that would not work. The country had changed too much. Popular protest arose at once, and the administration shifted tactics, turning to clandestine terror.

But simply ask who knew about it, and who did not? Surely the victims knew. So did the impressive array of terrorist states who participated. The media knew as well, but chose to suppress the most important facts. The only ones who had to be kept in the dark were the United States population. In fact, by other means – solidarity groups, church-based organizations, independent media, etc. – a great many people learned about what was being concealed, and popular opposition developed at a level far beyond that of the Indochina wars, and in historically unprecedented ways. But the target of the secrecy was the usual one: the population at home.

The belief that the doctrinal institutions control public opinion is simply wrong. They surely try to, and sometimes succeed, but often fail, sometimes in spectacular ways.

When you were in Brazil in 1996, you criticized neo-liberalism, which annoyed president Fernando Henrique Cardoso. He said: 'Chomsky understands about linguistics. I don't give opinions about linguistics'. About your work as a linguist, there is almost a unanimity. But your political opinions are classified by many critics as anti-American and dominated by conspiracy theories. What do you think about that?

Noam Chomsky: It is very easy to produce slanders, and a waste of time to repeat or respond to them. If there are arguments, I'll be happy to listen to them.

The comment about linguistics, if it was indeed made, is simply childish, meriting no response. For the record, some of the finest work in contemporary linguistics is done by people with no formal background in the subject at all. In fact, as every professional linguist knows, my own background in the field happens to be highly idiosyncratic and deficient. No one cares about such things in serious fields. What matters is not a formal endorsement, but the quality of the work. That should be elementary, and indeed is, in disciplines that take themselves seriously, though ideologists will of course resort to silly devices such as the one you quote to try to prevent discussion that departs from their doctrines.

I have already commented on the disgraceful concept 'anti-American.'

As for 'conspiracy theories,' the term has come to be used by apologists for power as the intellectual counterpart to a curse word. If you are too stupid, or ignorant, to respond to some critical commentary, you scream 'conspiracy theory.' These are silly games that do not merit attention or even brief comment.

In 1996, you advocated the suspension of payment of the Brazilian foreign debt. What is your position today about Brazil?

Noam Chomsky: That is not quite accurate. I did not recommend any specific policies, and would not have the audacity to do so. Many factors are involved in the decision as to whether Brazil or other countries should pay the so-called 'debt,' a decision that cannot be taken lightly.

Rather, I pointed out that the debt is to a large extent an ideological construction, not a simple economic fact. In substantial measure, third world debt could be relieved, in many cases eliminated, by resort to the capitalist principle that those who lend the money should assume the risk, and that the burden of repayment should fall on those who borrowed the money – which in Brazil, does not mean people in the *favelas*, or landless workers, or in fact the vast majority of the population. Naturally, the rich and powerful reject the capitalist principle with horror. Lenders want to gain the high yields, but prefer that the associated risk be socialized, transferred to northern taxpayers. One of the functions of the International Monetary Fund is to provide what amounts to 'free risk insurance' for highly profitable loans and investments. And in the borrowing country, the actual borrowers prefer capital flight, tax evasion, luxury imports, projects to enhance their own grandeur, etc. If the debt becomes unsustainable, they prefer that the costs be socialized, transferred to the great mass of the population who had nothing to do with the borrowing in the first place, through structural adjustment programmes and other means to enhance exports (for the benefit of lenders) while crushing the population. That has been a second, complementary function of the International Monetary Fund.

Resort to the unthinkable capitalist principle would go a long way towards paying the debt, if the debt indeed exists, which is also not obvious. The reason

is that under principles of international law crafted by the United States and employed by it when it has been convenient, the debt perhaps may fall within the category of ‘odious debt,’ so that it need not be paid at all. That was pointed out years ago by the United States executive director of the International Monetary Fund, Karen Lissakers, who wrote that the principle of odious debt, ‘if applied today would wipe out a substantial portion of the Third World’s indebtedness.’

In some cases there are even more conservative mechanisms: adhere to the judgment of the World Court. That simple device would relieve Nicaragua of its debt.

In Latin America, capital flight has often approximated debt, suggesting yet another method to pay the debt, if it even exists.

But the question whether countries should pursue conservative and legal means to deal with debt is a separate one. It has to do with power, not law and morality. Choices have to be made in this world, not some world of doctrinal fantasy, and this world is governed by the rule of force. It is only in children’s stories and the pages of journals of intellectual opinion that justice and law are the guiding principles of world order.

This year we will have election for president in Brazil. The candidate of the left, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, is leading the preference of the voters, with big chances to be elected. There is a fear, nevertheless, that, due to his political orientation, he would have problems dealing with the rich countries of Europe and North America. Do you believe that the governments of the rich countries would try to make things difficult for a leftist government in Brazil?

Noam Chomsky: If history is any guide, that is a virtual certainty, unless they feel that they can constrain the actions of a government with a populist orientation by other means. Tactics do vary in this regard. There are interesting historical examples, right in Latin America. But the general conclusion is an unmistakable lesson of history. It is also consistent with the internal planning record for many years. It would be remarkable if dominant institutions, state and private, were to react in any other way – unless constrained by their own citizens, always the crucial point.

What is the neo-liberalist intervention in the social policies of the world? To what extent is this initiative discouraging people from participating in the political process?

Noam Chomsky: A major thrust of neo-liberalism is to undermine democracy. It has been understood for at least 60 years that financial liberalization undermines the possibility of democratic choice, by creating a ‘virtual parliament’ of lenders and investors who have ‘veto power’ over government decisions (to quote mainstream economists). That is a primary reason why the Bretton Woods system (which was dismantled with the onset of neo-liberalism) was based on capital controls and regulated exchange rates. Those conditions made it possible for governments to institute social democratic measures, and the dismantling of the Bretton Woods system, with the onset of neo-liberalism, has had the

predictable effect of undermining these arrangements.

The same is true of other components of neo-liberalism, which, basically, seek to reduce the public arena of democratic choice, transferring decisions into the hands of unaccountable private tyrannies. The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), now being negotiated essentially in secret, has virtually nothing to do with trade, but quite a lot to do with reducing the arena of democratic participation and choice.

The point is well understood in élite circles, though it may be put in somewhat less abrasive terms for a public audience. For example, by David Rockefeller, in *Newsweek*, discussing the trend, which he strongly supports, towards 'lessening the role of government.' This, he continued, is 'something business people tend to be in favour of. But the other side of that coin is that somebody has to take government's place, and business seems to me to be a logical entity to do it. I think that too many business people simply haven't faced up to that, or they have said, "It's somebody else's responsibility; it's not mine". It's obviously not the responsibility of the public. That would be unthinkable.

Neo-liberal globalisation is being accused of many national disasters all around the globe, from Afghanistan to Argentina. But the political parties such as the Workers' Party in Brazil think that the alternative is what they call 'democratic socialism'. Do you agree? What does 'democratic socialism' mean to you? Has there ever existed a country both socialistic and democratic?

Noam Chomsky: I doubt that anyone thinks that a particular form of social organization is *the* solution to 'national disasters all around the globe.' These are many and various, the causes are diverse, and there are many different paths that should be explored, sometimes followed, towards ameliorating or overcoming them.

'Democratic socialism' is not a simple concept. Nor is one of its components, 'democracy.' At the simplest level, a society is democratic insofar as its population can make meaningful decisions over matters that concern them. It has long been understood that democratic forms have very limited substance when decisions over the fundamental aspects of life are in the hands of unaccountable concentrations of private power, and society is dominated by 'business for private profit through private control of banking, land, industry, reinforced by command of the press, press agents and other means of publicity and propaganda.'

I am not quoting the Workers' Party, but rather John Dewey, perhaps the most prominent and respected Western social philosopher of the 20th century, whose major concern was democratic theory, and who was 'as American as apple pie,' in the conventional phrase. In fact, his diagnosis of the serious deficiencies of contemporary democracy and recommendations for overcoming them echoed ideas (and actions) that trace back to the origins of the workers' movements in the United States, and elsewhere, and were, incidentally, developed without the dubious benefit of radical intellectuals, for the most part.

Adopting similar views, Dewey argued that if democratic forms are to have real substance, industry must be changed ‘from a feudalistic to a democratic social order’ based on workers’ control and free association, the core notion of socialism. Unless that happens, as he also observed, politics will remain ‘the shadow cast on society by big business, and the attenuation of the shadow will not change the substance.’ I mention Dewey only to point out that such conceptions are, or should be, second nature to those who give any thought to democratic principle, and as I mentioned, they have been commonplace among working people and popular movements generally, for a long time. It is, then, entirely appropriate that they should be taken up by the Workers’ Party, and adapted to what they see as the specific problems and circumstances of Brazil.

Many things have changed in the last months since September 11th. At the American Friends Service Committee Conference, on December 8th 2001, you said that, if current tendencies persist, ‘it is no exaggeration to say that the survival of the species is at risk’. Could you please point out the major tendencies that are already underway and explain why we are at risk?

Noam Chomsky: The question about major tendencies underway is too broad for me to try to answer at all comprehensively. Two of them are the sharply different programmes of ‘globalisation’ that are represented at the near-simultaneous Davos and Porto Alegre meetings. Apart from whatever else one might think about it, the Davos version really does threaten the survival of the species. One reason is that the underlying principles, if taken seriously, lead to the conclusion that it is quite rational to destroy the environment for our grandchildren, if by doing so we act as ‘rational wealth maximizers’ in the sense extolled in contemporary ideology. It is surprising that Bush is being criticized for undermining the Kyoto Protocol. He should be lauded – as indeed he is, by the editors of the *Wall Street Journal*, for example; dangerous fanatics no doubt, but at least honest enough to accept the doctrines they preach.

Another reason is provided by the expectations on the basis of which planners operate. US intelligence, for example, predicts that ‘globalisation’ – meaning, the Davos version – will lead to an increasing divide between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots.’ And military planners, adopting the same projections, argue plausibly that to maintain the wealth and power of the ‘haves’ it will be necessary to have enormous means of destruction available to control the unruly ‘have-nots.’ That is why the US military budget must exceed that of the next 15 countries combined (according to the analysis by the Center for Defense Information in Washington), even before September 11, when the fear and anguish of the population was exploited in a particularly crude and disgusting manner to ram through a huge increase in the military budget: totally irrelevant to terrorism, but useful for other purposes.

These projections are part of the official justification for the programmes of militarization of space, with effects that may destroy us all. The likely consequences are understood and described quite accurately by strategic analysts

in and out of government. But most of them, and government-corporate planners, do not consider the possibility of such outcomes to be very important as compared with the transcendent need to maximize short-term wealth and power.

To clarify, I am not talking about the right-wing, who are much more extreme. I'm referring to Clinton-era documents and plans, all quite public, incidentally. One can choose to close one's eyes to all of this rather than putting it on the front pages where it belongs. That's a choice, not a necessity, and not one for which we will be thanked by future generations.

The attacks of September 11 were followed by a highly emotional coverage by the north-American press, reproduced by the press around the world. The names and faces of the victims, and the suffering of their families have been showed until it got exhaustive. The same does not occur in coverage of wars in Africa, Iraq or even in Afghanistan. Do you think that these contrasts may have been in part responsible for the support that the public opinion around the world gave to United States in that episode?

Noam Chomsky: More pertinent is the fact that the same does not occur in the case of international terrorist operations carried out or sponsored by the United States and its allies, which – regrettably – have often had a far greater toll than September 11, as Latin Americans surely know very well, and they are hardly alone. The atrocities of September 11 were historically unique, but not because of their scale, unfortunately; rather, because of the target. These are the kinds of atrocities that Europe and its offshoots carry out against others; for the first time, the guns were pointed in the other direction.

But the question you raise cannot be answered as formulated, because its assumptions are not accurate. First of all, public opinion in the United States is far more diverse and nuanced than what is presented in the headlines and the journals of intellectual opinion. That was even reported in the national press, on the few occasions when efforts were made to explore public opinion, including New York City. Furthermore, public opinion around the world was mostly opposed to military action that harmed civilians – meaning, the military action that was planned and implemented. That was clear from the beginning, even in international polls. The public did support action to find and punish the perpetrators, but that is quite a different matter. And the world public was generally well aware, and often quite outspoken, about the fact that the traditional victims of the atrocities of the powerful are treated very differently, even in the case of crimes that far exceed even those of September 11 – which, unfortunately, are all too easy to list, as most people know very well, surely in Latin America.

After September 11, the United States has shifted positions with some countries. What are the most significant effects of this strategy?

Noam Chomsky: After September 11, murderous and repressive states throughout the world realized at once that they could gain US authorization for their crimes by joining the 'coalition against terror.' And that's exactly what they have been doing: Russia, China, Uzbekistan, Turkey, Israel,... quite a long list. The same is

true of the United States, Britain, and others, where the more harsh and repressive elements are exploiting the opportunity to extend state power to control their citizens, under the same pretext. How substantial these effects will be, no one can say. As always, these are matters for action, not idle speculation.

One consequence, however, is rather clear: the United States is using the opportunity to establish a military presence in Central Asia, forming alliances with states that are hardly different from the Taliban, with the intention of gaining firmer control over the energy and other resources of the region, as well as strategic advantage. Russia and China are hardly pleased about that, not to speak of smaller actors like Iran.

How have international relations changed since September 11?

Noam Chomsky: September 11 was a historic event, not in the scale of the atrocity, which, regrettably, is all too familiar. Rather, in the directions in which the guns are pointing. This is the first time in United States history since the British burned down Washington in 1814 that the national territory – not colonies, but the national territory – has been under attack, or even threat. I need not recount what has been done to others during these almost two centuries.

For ‘the homeland,’ Europe itself, the change is even more dramatic. Europe did not conquer and occupy most of the world by handing out candy to babies. But India never attacked England, nor Algeria France, nor the Congo Belgium,... Terrorism is the normal way in which *we* treat *them*; it is not supposed to be directed against the United States.

The shock that reverberated after September 11 is entirely understandable, as is the lack of concern or even attention when Admiral Sir Michael Boyce, chief of the British Defence Staff, announced official United States-United Kingdom policy, prominently reported in a lead article in the world’s leading newspaper: He warned the people of Afghanistan that they will be subjected to devastating attack ‘until they get their leadership changed,’ a textbook illustration of international terrorism as defined in United States law.

Similarly, it is understandable when there is no concern, perhaps mild regret, as the United States-United Kingdom implemented that policy with the firm expectation that it will place huge numbers of people at grave risk of starvation and slow death, millions according to their calculations. In both cases – September 11, and the aftermath – the reactions are natural, on the assumption that history should pursue its normal course: *we* carry out unspeakable atrocities against *them*, while the intellectual classes laud themselves and their leaders for their nobility. That is a good part of history, in the real world.

After September 11, the United States re-declared a ‘war on terrorism,’ adopting the same rhetoric as that of the Reagan administration 20 years earlier, when it came into office declaring that the core of US foreign policy would be a ‘war on terrorism,’ particularly its most virulent form, state-supported international terrorism. The United States fought the war on terrorism by constructing an international terrorist network of unprecedented scale, and using

it to lethal effect in Central America, Africa, West Asia, and elsewhere, even leading to condemnation of the United States by the World Court for international terrorism, supported by the United Nations Security Council in a resolution, vetoed by the United States, calling on all states to observe international law.

For South America, this was just a continuation of the wave of United States-supported international terrorism that was initiated when John F. Kennedy, in 1962, shifted the mission of the Latin American military from 'hemispheric defence' to 'internal security'; there should be no need to elaborate the meaning of that term, and how it was translated into practice, surely not in Brazil.

The leaders of the first war on terrorism have a prominent role in its current reincarnation: for example John Negroponte, who leads the diplomatic efforts at the UN and learned about international terrorism when he served as pro-consul of Honduras 20 years ago, supervising the terrorist war against Nicaragua for which his government was condemned by the highest international authorities; or Donald Rumsfeld, who directs the military component of the war to 'crush terrorism,' as he puts it, and who learned his trade as Reagan's special envoy to the Middle East, where the Reagan administration and its Israeli ally easily won the prize for international terrorism in those years.

None of this elicits any comment, just as there is no reaction to the explicit advocacy, and implementation, of massive international terrorism by the powerful today. One should expect nothing different, given the prevailing conventions about how history is supposed to work.

Of course, there are some changes. United States-Russian relations have become more friendly, at least temporarily, because Russia is eager to join the 'war against terrorism' so as to gain the approval of the reigning superpower for its horrendous terrorist crimes in Chechnya. China happily joins for similar reasons. In fact, throughout the world, harsh and brutal elements recognize that they have a 'window of opportunity' to implement their agendas, crudely exploiting the fear and anguish of people who are rightly frightened that they too might become victims of international terrorism.

The aftermath of September 11 demonstrated even more firmly than before that although the world may be tripolar in economic terms, it is dramatically unipolar in military terms, and that disparity is rapidly increasing, as Washington is exploiting the opportunity to increase sharply the military spending that already dwarfed that of all other significant powers combined, with ambitious plans to expand to new frontiers, particularly space war, now a United States monopoly.

But these are all continuations of ongoing tendencies, not substantial new departures.

Did the world change after September 11th? For worse or for better, in your opinion? Why?

Noam Chomsky: September 11 was a historic event. For hundreds of years, Europe and its offshoots have been conducting large-scale terror and atrocities throughout much of the world. For the first time, they have been the target of

terrible atrocities, not the agent. Not surprisingly, the reaction has been extremely violent, primarily of course by the United States and its British junior partner, both of which have plenty of experience in dealing with the lesser breeds.

It takes a good deal of discipline for Western intellectuals ‘not to notice’ that the so-called War on Terror is led by the one state in the world that has been condemned for international terrorism by the highest international authorities, the World Court and the Security Council (in a resolution vetoed by the United States, Britain abstaining); and that the very same people who were condemned for these particular terrorist crimes, while engaging in others that were even worse, have leadership roles in the second ‘War on Terror.’ The first war was declared 20 years earlier by the Reagan Administration with much the same rhetoric. And there is no need to take time to describe how that war was conducted, surely not in Latin America.

This one is hardly different. The attack against Afghan civilians was savage and destructive, but passes without particular notice, because this is simply the historical norm. And as in the case of the first War on Terror, the second is joined eagerly by states who seek authorization for their own atrocities. Russia, for example, is an enthusiastic partner because it wants United States backing for its terror in Chechnya, and other harsh and repressive elements throughout the world also see a ‘window of opportunity’ to escalate their crimes or to impose reactionary agendas.

The phenomenon is worldwide, taking various forms. It has been sharply condemned by human rights organizations, and there is substantial popular resistance. But in general, it is hard to deny that the world has changed for the worse, at least temporarily, as a result of the terrorist atrocities of September 11. The perpetrators not only committed terrible crimes on September 11, but, as was predicted at once, struck a serious blow against poor and suffering people throughout the world, and against democracy and human rights.

Are there new forces to oppose the hegemony of the United States in the world, and to rebuild a picture similar to that which obtained earlier with the Soviet Union?

A: Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, there were two world rulers, the United States far more powerful, the USSR functioning more or less as a junior partner in global management. The wars of the period were not between the superpowers. Rather, each used the threat of the other as a pretext for the resort to terror and violence to control their own domains. That is revealed very clearly in the internal documentary record, and the record of events as well. For the West, the Cold War was a continuation of what is sometimes called the North-South conflict, what used to be called ‘European imperialism.’

Accordingly, the policies persist without much change after the Cold War, just as they were pursued before. In fact, the East-West conflict at its roots had many of the features of North-South conflicts. It is true that each superpower cynically exploited conflicts in the realms of the other, but that is a separate matter. One aspect of this cynicism has, in fact, become the most prominent feature of world

affairs in the past few months. Only the purposely blind do not know the roots of radical Islamism (including the current enemies): who nurtured and fostered it, and why they did so.

One surely would not want to see a system of that kind reconstructed, and there is, fortunately, no sign of that happening. What has actually been developing for many years – quite clearly in the past several decades – is a world order that is economically tripolar and military unipolar.

Europe and Asia are roughly on a par with the United States economically and in other respects, but the United States is increasingly alone as a military force. The dominant school of international relations – called 'realists' – generally expects coalitions to develop to counter that unique status. That is entirely possible. My own view, however, is that the theoretical constructions are so weak, and the empirical evidence so ambiguous, that predictions are of very low confidence; and that other factors, not considered in these state-centred approaches, are far more significant: those coalescing at Davos and Porto Alegre, for example.

What reasonable people should hope for, I think, is a world system of a very different kind. On issues of central significance – 'globalisation,' for example – the majority of the population of the United States is opposed to 'US hegemony.' That is why planning and implementation have to be carried out in secret – that is, in secret from the general population; the rich and powerful know all about it, and are directly involved in it. The important fault lines of international society are not the United States versus others. They cut across state systems. That is true both at Davos and at Porto Alegre, representing different elements of the global system.

You have cited Thucydides saying 'large nations do what they wish, while small nations accept what they must.' What are the long-term consequences of the present situation for the different continents and countries? What could be the effects for South America, for Brazil, and why?

Noam Chomsky: The maxim of Thucydides does not apply with anything like the force of earlier years, because of the advance of civilization, which has led to popular restraints on state violence – much less than one would like, but very clear, notably in the past generation. Most of the population of the world has a great deal to gain by extending such constraints, and reducing state power and the private concentrations of power that are tightly linked to it; in my view, dismantling them. The more that happens, the less the maxim holds.

Globalisation, Porto Alegre-style, can be a major factor in protecting small nations, as well as the population within all nations, great and small. That crucial factor aside, South-South cooperation can be an independent factor providing means of defence for 'small nations' – not small in population, that is, but in control of wealth and means of violence.

You say that the United States is a leading terrorist state. Do you feel that the US is now looking at a different foreign policy? Do you see possible positive changes?

Noam Chomsky: It's misleading to state that I am the one who makes that

statement. I am simply repeating the judgment of the World Court and Security Council, and applying the official United States definition of ‘terrorism’ to actions of the US government, which are hardly controversial.

Hence I am endorsing what every literate person knows, even if they prefer not to say it.

Can there be positive changes? Of course. In fact there have been. No United States president could possibly undertake the aggression that John F. Kennedy launched against South Vietnam 40 years ago, arousing no visible protest or even interest. The country has become much more civilized, a consequence of the activism of the 1960s, and even more, subsequent years. There is no reason why those tendencies should not persist, as they have throughout much of history – fortunately for those of us alive today.

The American government has called the war in Afghanistan ‘the war against terrorism’. Do you think that this kind of military action will be efficient against terrorism?

Noam Chomsky: A few elementary facts seem relevant. The ‘war against terrorism’ was declared – actually re-declared – by the one state in the world that has been condemned for international terrorism by the International Court of Justice, and that vetoed a Security Council Resolution calling on all states to observe international law, with the International Court ruling in mind.

Among the most enthusiastic participants in the war are other states with a shocking record of terrorist atrocities. Russia, for example, is happy to join, anticipating that the reigning superpower will authorize its vicious war in Chechnya; China goes along for similar reasons. Turkey was the first country to offer troops. Its Prime Minister explained that Turkey was doing so in gratitude for Washington’s decisive aid in its murderous war against its Kurdish population, some of the worst ethnic cleansing and other atrocities of the 1990s, relying on a huge flow of arms from the Clinton administration. And so on, down the list.

I say ‘re-declared’ because the first ‘war against terrorism’ was declared by the Reagan administration when it came into office 20 years ago, with rhetoric very similar to today’s, and considerable continuity in personnel. Reagan’s special envoy to the Middle East, where the administration was a leading sponsor of massive terrorist atrocities, is now in charge of the military component of the re-declared war. Its diplomatic component is led at the United Nations by the man who was ‘pro-consul’ of Honduras, charged with the task of organizing the terrorist war against Nicaragua for which the United States was condemned by the highest international authorities – without effect, of course. Other leading figures in the Reaganite ‘war against terrorism’ also have a prominent role in its renewal today. In the 1980s, they combated what their President called ‘the evil scourge of terrorism’ by constructing an international terrorist network of unprecedented scale, with a human cost that I need not review, just as it is unnecessary to review earlier exploits in Latin America and elsewhere. The story

continues with little change. It suffices to compare the leading recipients of US arms and military training with the human rights reports of the major international organizations, even the State Department. Nor is the United States unique, apart from scale.

The renewed campaign has to be evaluated on its merits. But whatever it may be, it cannot seriously be called a 'war against terrorism.' George Orwell would turn over in his grave at the thought.

There is an official definition of terrorism, for example, in the United States Code and Army Manuals. It is a fine definition, but it cannot be used, because if applied it will yield intolerable answers, like those just reviewed – a very partial sample. Therefore the term 'terrorism,' in practice, refers to terrorism that *they* carry out against *us*, whoever *we* happen to be. That is probably a historical universal. Even the worst killers adopted that practice. The Nazis, for example, portrayed themselves, and no doubt perceived themselves, to be defending the population and the legitimate governments from the 'terrorist partisans directed from abroad.' It is unnecessary to mention recent examples in the southern cone of Latin America.

With that convention in mind, military actions against 'terrorism' can of course be effective. Nazi 'counter-terrorism' was effective. There are other dramatic examples.

What has changed in the way the United States conducts its external conflicts in the last years?

Noam Chomsky: There were, of course, some changes with the collapse of the second (and much weaker) superpower. That led to readjustment in tactics, and new pretexts, but not to major changes in policy. That was evident at once. Immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the United States invaded Panama, killing probably thousands of people, vetoing two Security Council resolutions, and installing a puppet regime of bankers and narco-traffickers (narco-trafficking sharply escalated, as congressional and other reports soon revealed). The goal was to kidnap a brutal thug who had become disobedient. He was sentenced in Florida for crimes that he had mostly committed while he was on the CIA payroll and was being praised by the Reagan administration for the honesty of the election he stole by fraud and violence.

All of this was so familiar as to be a footnote to history, but there were two differences. First, the pretexts were different. The invasion was not 'in defence against an outpost of the Soviet empire, seeking to conquer the hemisphere and destroy us.' Rather, it was in defence against Hispanic narco-traffickers. And as noted at once by former Reagan official Elliott Abrams, this was the first time that the United States could resort to force without concern that there might be some Russian reaction somewhere in the world.

The same was true of the next exercise of force, against a far more brutal gangster whom the United States and the United Kingdom had happily supported through his worst atrocities, but who had to be punished for his first serious

crime: disobedience. The war in Iraq was not presented as a defence against the Russians, and the United States and United Kingdom would never have dared to deploy huge ground forces if there were any deterrent. The same continues to the present.

There were also changes in general strategic posture, with interesting admissions of the falsity of the traditional pretexts, and open acknowledgment that the real enemy was independent nationalism in the South. That much had been clear from internal documents for many years, but it was now openly acknowledged, the Soviet pretext having disappeared. Nuclear strategies also changed, with more emphasis on weapons aimed at the 'target-rich' South instead of the 'weapons-rich' Soviet Union, in Pentagon parlance.

I have reviewed this in extensive detail elsewhere, both the rich documentary record of planners and the events themselves, and cannot try to do so here.

How should the world react to the international terrorism?

Noam Chomsky: International terrorism is a crime, often a terrible crime. The proper response to crime is investigation to discover the perpetrators, who should be found and brought to a fair trial. That is true whether it is a robbery in the streets, or the crimes of 11 September. Or international terrorist crimes for which there has never been any doubt about the agents. There is a long, long list.

To mention just a few: the bombing of barrio *El Chorillo* in Panama by Bush I, killing probably thousands of people; Clinton's bombing of a pharmaceutical plant in the Sudan, leading to several tens of thousands of dead according to the few analyses undertaken (the German Ambassador in the Sudan, the regional director of the respected Near East foundation); the terrorist war against Nicaragua that left tens of thousands dead and the country devastated, perhaps beyond recovery, an uncontroversial case in the light of the judgment of the highest international authorities; or much worse crimes of state-supported international terrorism that easily come to mind. It should be unnecessary to proceed with details in Brazil, the first target of United States-supported state terrorism after Kennedy's reversal of the role of the Latin American military and the actions of his administration to lay the basis for the 1964 military coup, which was hailed by his Ambassador Lincoln Gordon as a 'democratic rebellion' that was 'the single most decisive victory of freedom in the mid-twentieth century,' well after the grim consequences were clear.

In none of these cases do the victims have any moral or legal right to resort to violence to punish suspected terrorists, or even those whose guilt is beyond doubt. And there certainly is no right to punish civilian populations to compel them to hand over the suspected criminals, in accord with official United States-United Kingdom advocacy of massive international terrorism. Cuba, for example, has no right to carry out bombings or bio-terror in the United States, even though it has been perhaps the leading target of state-supported international terrorism since 1959. Nor does Haiti have the right to do the same, even though the United States refuses to extradite a convicted criminal who

headed the paramilitary forces that brutally murdered thousands of people under a coup regime that received tacit support from the first Bush and Clinton administrations. Nor would that be legitimate even in far worse cases.

When the West is the source of international terrorism, such responses would be regarded as outrageous and despicable, and quite properly so. It is the most elementary of moral truisms that if some measures are considered legitimate when applied to an enemy, we must agree – in fact insist – that they apply to us as well. When the powerful and privileged are able to rise to this minimal level of moral integrity, it will be possible to discuss the problem seriously. Until that revolutionary change takes place, we will continue to live in the world described thousands of years ago by Thucydides, a world in which the great and powerful do as they will and the weak suffer as they must, while the secular priesthood leads the chorus of praise for their leaders, extolling the 'noble phase' of their foreign endeavours and its 'saintly glow,' to borrow some of the phraseology of respected commentators in the world's leading newspaper.

One of the most remarkable triumphs of the awesome Western propaganda systems is that it is even worth stating these factual and moral truisms. One might expect that they would be understood automatically, without the need for any comment, particularly among the traditional victims. Unfortunately, that is not so, and it is, furthermore, not so unusual. Slavery, oppression of women and working people, and other severe violations of human rights have been able to endure in part because the values of the oppressors have been internalised by the victims, in various ways. That is why 'consciousness raising' is often the first step in liberation.

Which economic interests lay behind the North American anti-terrorist campaign?

Noam Chomsky: Remember that the 'war on terrorism' was declared 20 years ago, by the Reagan administration, in much the same terms as its renewal in September 2001, and with many of the same leading participants. There are economic interests, as in all significant policy issues. But it serves primarily as a cover for other policies, much as the 'Communist threat' did when it was still possible to appeal to it without ridicule.

The first 'war on terrorism' was used as a pretext for vast campaigns of international terrorism, primarily in Central America, but also in the Middle East, Southern Africa, and Asia. And the current 'war' is being used for similar purposes, and also to establish a strong United States military presence in Central Asia, of importance because of its energy resources and strategic location.

That is not to deny the existence of a terrorist threat. It is very real. For hundreds of years, Europe and its offshoots have had a virtual monopoly on the international violence in which they are involved: India did not attack England, or the Congo Belgium, or the Philippines the United States, and on, and on. That has now changed, even if only in a limited way. Europe and its offshoots can now also be targets, for the first time. In that sense, September 11 was a historic event: not in the scale of the atrocity, but the directions in which the guns are pointing.

What kind of influence do you think the North American armament industry has today in the external politics of President Bush? Is your evaluation that the warlike actions of the United States will continue, due to the Bush relations with this industrial sector?

Noam Chomsky: It should be kept in mind that the ‘armament industry’ is, in effect, high-tech industry. The famous ‘new economy’ was largely developed under the cover of military spending: that includes computers and electronics generally, telecommunications and information technology (including the internet), automation, lasers, ‘civilian’ aircraft (hence the huge tourism industry), containerization, and much else. Even the vast social engineering project of suburbanization was conducted in large measure under the pretext of ‘defence.’ This is a major reason why the United States insists on ‘national security exemptions’ in the mislabelled ‘free trade agreements’: these exemptions permit the vast system of state intervention in the economy to continue without impediment from the neo-liberal principles – which, in the traditional fashion of several centuries, are to a large extent a weapon against the poor.

Of course, the Pentagon system has other purposes, and is quite frank about them. The United States Space Command, for example, justifies its programmes for militarization of space as necessary to protect US commercial interests and investments, pointing out – accurately – that in the past armies and navies were developed for the same purposes. The relations of the Bush administration with this sector are somewhat different than those of other presidents, but not much. All are committed to the same basic objectives of global control, and preservation of the dynamic state sector of the economy to socialize cost and risk while privatizing power and profit – ‘really existing capitalism.’

Is President George W. Bush the right man at the right time, as recent popular polls say he is?

Noam Chomsky: The question presupposes that what he is doing is right. That can be assumed only by those who favour terrorism, violence, and large-scale atrocities. As for polls, I would suggest caution. When people are asked whether they support the use of force against the perpetrators of the terrorist actions of September 11, they overwhelmingly agree. When they are asked whether they support the use of force if innocent civilians will be harmed, the numbers go down very sharply.

Furthermore, only the most careful readers of the press, who rely also on other independent sources, are aware that the United States-United Kingdom undertook their actions with the expectation that it would drive huge numbers of people to the edge of starvation, perhaps beyond. Four months later, distribution of desperately-needed food and other aid has still barely begun, though ample supplies have been available for months. And even the mainstream media report that the country is reverting to the rule of the same warlords who committed such awful crimes in the early 90s that much of the population welcomed the Taliban.

We will never know whether the most dire expectations of the planners of the

war have proven accurate. These are Western crimes, hence not examined. Does Western elite opinion know, or care, how many people were victims of the first United States-run War on Terror? Or how many were killed in the single bombing of the barrio *El Chorillo*, to mention a minor footnote? Is it thousands, as Panamanians have claimed? Does it matter?

But the toll is surely large, and the expectations alone mark the actions as shocking crimes. We evaluate an action, and the commentary on it, on the basis of the expectations when it is undertaken. That's a moral truism. One naturally hopes for the best, and there are some reasons for optimism. But such hopes rely on significant popular pressures and activism, primarily in the more rich and powerful countries.

How do you see the 'democratization wave'? What is this democracy? This is leading us to where?

Noam Chomsky: I see it pretty much the way the general public in the United States and Latin America see it. Polls show desire for democracy, but steady reduction in faith in what is called 'democracy.' That has been true in Latin America ever since the 'democratization wave' began, for good reasons.

As Argentine political scientist Atilio Boron pointed out years ago, 'democratization' coincided with neo-liberalism, which undermines democracy. The same has been true in the United States since it was subjected to its own form of 'neo-liberalism' in the past 20 years. After Reagan took over, the number of people who think that government serves 'the few and the special interests,' not 'the people,' soon rose from the standard 50% to about 80%.

On the eve of the November 2000 presidential election, about 75% of the population didn't take it seriously, dismissing it as a game involving rich contributors, party bosses, and the public relations industry, which crafts candidates to produce meaningless words that might attract some voters. But they must keep away from serious issues, because on these, public opinion tends to diverge quite sharply from the consensus of both factions of the business party. The general public seems to be well aware of this, throughout the hemisphere, judging by public opinion studies and other evidence.

There is no reason this has to continue, of course. This is just a phase in a struggle that has gone on for hundreds of years, and there have been many victories for the general public, along with setbacks. The cycle, however, is generally upwards, I think, over a long stretch.

Argentina followed the liberal textbook and today they mirror the failure of that model. The people reacted and took to the streets. But the social upheaval continues. In whose hands is the money that left Argentina? What can be the outcome of this story; and what could happen to the neighbouring countries, such as Brazil?

Noam Chomsky: As to where the money is, the question surely merits investigation, and I think we can make a fair guess as to the answer. As I mentioned, over the years, capital flight from Latin America has often been of

the order of the so-called debt. Much of the money that left Argentina is debt-repayment, hence in the hands of the lenders: banks, financial institutions, etc. A congressional investigation a year ago found that major United States international banks are providing a 'gateway' for a huge flow of cash from illegal activity, including banks heavily involved in Latin America, and suggested that the same is true of the international banking system. That suggests other avenues to follow.

In general, the suggestion implicit in the question is a good one: it is a fine idea to trace the money and find out what happened to it, and then draw the appropriate conclusions, and not only in Argentina. As compared with other regions, notably East Asia, Latin America has suffered grievously from the fact that the wealthy essentially have no obligations. That is revealed by tax evasion, capital flight, imports of luxury vs. capital goods, and many other measures. The outcome will always be disastrous for most of the population. As to the outcome for Brazil, that depends on whether the people of Brazil will be able to take their fate into their own hands, in cooperation with others, elsewhere, who face similar problems. That is, it will depend on whether the people of the world are able to bring about the kind of globalisation that will be beneficial to their interests.

Could you make an assessment of the countries which have a stronger relationship of dependency upon the United States, such as Mexico? Could they have a social upheaval such as the one in Argentina? Considering America's veto power, is there today any viable alternative, or any chance for the economies struggling to become independent?

Noam Chomsky: On Mexico, there is no need to rely on my assessment. One expert assessment was produced by the Economic Policy Institute, a highly-regarded research institute in Washington, in a study investigating the effects of the North America Free Trade Area on working people. The study was released at the opening of the Summit of the Americas in Quebec last April, along with a study on the effects of the North America Free Trade Area on labour rights, produced by Human Rights Watch. Both studies found that the North America Free Trade Area was one of those rare agreements that succeeded in harming the large majority of the population in all the participating countries. But that was the wrong story: the required conclusion, heralded by the leaders (and therefore the press), is that the North America Free Trade Area was a grand success, which should be the model for the planned Free Trade Area of the Americas. Therefore the two major studies were suppressed, with the usual impressive obedience and unanimity. The Economic Policy Institute study found that the effect on Mexicans was the most severe, not surprisingly. Wages had declined steadily since the imposition of neo-liberal reforms in the 1980s. That continued after the North America Free Trade Area, with a 25% decline in incomes for salaried workers, and 40% for the self-employed, an effect magnified by the rapid increase in unsalaried workers. Similar effects were found throughout the economy, including even a decline in total investment (despite a vast increase in

foreign investment). A small sector became extremely wealthy, and foreign investors prospered. Officially, trade increased, but that is only by doctrinal decision, which counts cross-border transfers within a corporation as 'trade,' an idea that classical liberals would have found scandalous. The details are highly revealing, but I cannot review them here. They are confirmed in other independent studies, and in fact reported rather accurately in the business press.

There already have been social upheavals in Mexico. The *Zapatistas* are the best known. In scale, the most extreme upheaval, by far, is the huge flight of the population across the border, where those who make it – many do not – work for miserable wages under illegal conditions, lowering the costs of commodities for US consumers and profiting agribusiness. Whether the massive popular resentment can be channelled into constructive social change is, as usual, a matter of choice, not speculation.

Reference to 'America's veto power' is, again, highly misleading. Here 'America' means concentrated economic-political-ideological power, which is opposed by most of the domestic population on the issues we are now discussing. So the 'veto power' is also exercised against the population of the United States. We are back to the same problems. No sensible answers can be given unless we escape the grip of conventional ideology and formulate the questions in proper terms, not the terms of ideological warfare. When we do that, we reach fairly simple answers, and important ones, I think, with many consequences for thought and action.

How do you relate the politics of the State of Israel with the wider politics of the current imperialist globalisation?

Noam Chomsky: Israel pursues its own goals, like other states. But like other states, within a framework of international order established by the more powerful.

By 1958, the highest United States planning body, the National Security Council, recognized that a 'logical corollary' of US opposition to Arab nationalism is support for Israel as a reliable base for US power in the region. Serious implementation of that concept took place only a decade later, when Israel destroyed the leading force of Arab nationalism, Nasserite Egypt. That was recognized in the United States to be a major contribution to US goals in the region. The United States-Israel alliance began to take on its present form at that time, and Israel also became the darling of US intellectual opinion, thanks to its achievement in showing how to deal with third world upstarts properly: that includes most of the left, incidentally, something that should not surprise anyone familiar with the history of intellectuals. In subsequent years, the alliance became much firmer, for similar reasons.

The Nixon administration described Israel as one of its 'cops on the beat' in the Middle East, controlling unruly elements: police headquarters, of course, remained in Washington, though Britain, with its centuries of experience in such matters, is regarded as a reliable attack dog. United States intelligence, and Senators who took a prominent role in Middle East affairs and energy affairs,

described US policy in the Middle East as having ‘three pillars’: (1) Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, where most of the oil is; (2) Iran, then under the Shah, and a major military force as well as an energy producer; (3) Israel, another local gendarme, and a very efficient one.

When the Shah fell, Israel’s role became even more important, and by then, it was also providing valuable secondary services, helping to implement United States terrorist projects around the world when Congress, under public pressure, was restricting direct involvement. That was particularly true in Latin America, where Israel had close relations with the regime of the Argentine generals (which was viciously anti-Semitic, but that made no difference), was training United States terrorist forces attacking Nicaragua, and providing arms to the genocidal generals of Guatemala, among other services. The same was true in southern Africa and the Far East.

By now Israel has become much like the United States: the economy is based to a large extent on high technology, integrated with the US and heavily based on the military system; it shares with the United States the prize for highest inequality in the industrial world; formerly efficient social services are deteriorating; and it plays its role in US projects in the region, which are largely concerned with control over energy. Israel’s long-standing alliance with Turkey is now completely in the open, including the close participation in the United States-Turkey military alliance, which includes bases in Eastern Turkey for nuclear-armed US aircraft. All of this is a tragedy for Israeli Jews, in my opinion (shared with many Israelis); and of course for Palestinians.

What’s your opinion about the conflicts in the Middle East and the United States position in this international issue? Do you expect the United States to profoundly change its policy towards the rest of the world?

Noam Chomsky: There is no reason to expect United States policy to change significantly because it has been subjected, for the first time in its history (or the history of Europe), to the kind of terrorist atrocity that Europeans have carried out in the rest of the world for centuries. Or because in response to this atrocity, it was able to use overwhelming force to crush a virtually defenceless enemy.

The United States is using the opportunity to establish a military presence in Central Asia, which is a change, and to solidify its alliances with brutal and repressive states there and elsewhere. But by and large I see no reason to expect many changes. If by the conflicts in the Middle East you mean Israel-Palestine, then it is likely that the United States will persist in its long-standing policy of rejecting Palestinian national rights, in virtual international isolation, and providing its Israeli client with the decisive military and diplomatic support to pursue the United States-Israeli goal of maintaining a ‘permanent neo-colonial dependency’ in the occupied territories (to borrow the phrase of the Barak Government’s chief negotiator at Camp David in summer 2000).

That should leave the Palestinians some enclaves to administer, perhaps called ‘a state,’ much as Transkei was called ‘a state’ by its sponsors. A look at the

Camp David maps, not just the rhetoric, makes the intentions clear enough, as they have been for many years. We have already seen ample evidence of those continuities: in December 2001, when the United States vetoed a Security Council Resolution that called for an end to violence and dispatch of unarmed international monitors to help reduce the level of violence; and undermined a conference on the Geneva Conventions called by Switzerland, the responsible government. These acts virtually ensure that state terror will increase, along with the terrorism of the people under occupation – another reason why one cannot seriously use the phrase ‘war against terrorism.’

What do you think about the creation of a Palestinian State? Is it viable?

Noam Chomsky: The first official recognition of the possibility of a Palestinian State by the United States-Israel coalition was, to my knowledge, under the extremist right-wing government of Binyamin Netanyahu. His Minister of Communication and Planning said that the Palestinians can call the cantons assigned to them ‘a state’ if they like – or, he added elegantly, ‘fried chicken.’ That is well beyond the preceding Rabin and Peres Labour Governments, which adamantly denied that there could ever be a Palestinian state. Doubtless the United States would accept the same arrangement. In a conference at an Israeli university in 1997 on the occupied territories, where I gave the keynote address, I read a passage from a standard history of South Africa, describing the Bantustans established 40 years ago. It was unnecessary to draw any comparisons: they were obvious to the audience. In fact, in Israeli discussion the plans have often been called ‘a Bantustan settlement.’

Prime Minister Ehud Barak’s chief negotiator at Camp David in summer 2000, Shlomo ben-Ami (considered a dove), had described the goal of the Oslo process, quite accurately, as a ‘permanent neo-colonial dependency’ for the Palestinians. That kind of state the United States and Israel would no doubt accept. Whether a Palestinian state with a modicum of independence can be established depends on what the United States will decide, and that in turn depends on developments internal to the US, though international pressures should not be underestimated. Palestinians have suffered severely from the fact that most of the world, including Latin America, abandoned their previous commitment to an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel when the United States took over unilateral control of Middle East diplomacy after the Gulf War, first at Madrid, later in the Oslo process. That too can change.

Professor, is there a possibility for a new world? How can we reach it?

Noam Chomsky: Not only is there a possibility, it’s a virtual certainty, unless humans succeed in destroying themselves – as they might, unfortunately. Furthermore, it should be a better world, at least in many respects. How can we achieve that? The same ways that have been used throughout history. Why don’t we live under feudalism, or kings and princes, or neo-Nazi generals? Why has slavery been reduced (unfortunately, only partially)? Why do women

(sometimes) have rights they didn't in past eras? It's easy to continue. There are no magic keys, no simple answers, just hard, dedicated, committed struggle, in ways that we all know and many of us have experienced directly.

Your work as a student of linguistics was considered 'élitist' because it proposed a common basis in all languages, which is, for the multiculturalists, to despise cultural differences. But your political militancy is against élitism. How do you see this question? Isn't it a false contradiction? New researches, by the way, tend to confirm your linguistic theory.

Noam Chomsky: Is it 'élitist' to point out that there is a 'common basis' for human visual systems, which accounts for the fact that children under normal conditions develop a human visual system while insects do not – varying to be sure with experience, but basically cast to the same mould? Or to take a comparable truism, that there is a 'common basis' for human linguistic systems, which accounts for the fact that children under normal conditions develop a human language while cats and chimpanzees do not – varying to be sure with experience, but basically cast to the same mould?

More generally, is it élitist to suppose that human higher mental faculties are like everything else that we know of in the biological world, and that each child is, therefore, capable of acquiring any human language, or moral system, or any other aspect of what we loosely call 'culture'? That seems just elementary sanity. In fact, the most extreme multiculturalists must be committed to this thesis. A child does not acquire a culture by taking a pill. My granddaughter could have acquired the cultures of Australian aborigines, Thai Buddhists, or any other human society, but her pet kitten or chimpanzee could not, just as she cannot acquire their competence in many areas, or the communication and navigational skills of insects.

Unless we believe in magic, all of this is traceable to genetic endowment, which provides a 'common basis' for what was traditionally called the 'species character' of particular organisms; humans as well, assuming that they are part of the natural world, not angels. Of course, there are serious and important questions about what constitutes this species character, including the shared language faculty. No single person, neither I nor anyone else, owns a linguistic theory, and my own ideas change virtually every time a graduate student comes into my office with some new thoughts on these matters. Recent work has indeed clarified many of these questions, sometimes in most intriguing and surprising ways, while opening new problems that were previously unimagined. That is what one should expect of a research programme that is alive and worth pursuing.

There is a fear that, due to the hunt for terrorists, the individual liberties of the North-American people and immigrants in the United States will be negatively affected. What do you think about that?

Noam Chomsky: There is no doubt that harsh and repressive elements throughout the world are exploiting the fear and anguish of the population as a 'window of opportunity' to achieve their ends, including the goal of increasing the power of

the state to impose discipline and obedience, as demanded by those who defame the term 'conservative' by adopting it. New legislation in the United States could contribute to this end, as elsewhere. Whether reactionary forces succeed in this very natural endeavour is, again, a matter of will and choice. My guess is that in the United States at least they will not get very far, though they will surely try, and already have done so.

How do you analyse the State of 'Control by Punishment' which imprisons millions of people in contemporary societies?

Noam Chomsky: One has to look at specific cases. Take the United States. 20 years ago, the United States had roughly the same proportion of the population in prison as other industrial countries. Crime rates were also about the same, and have remained so. Since that time, however, the number of people incarcerated has risen steadily; the numbers increased by another 50% during the Clinton years. By now the level is 5-10 times as high as other industrial societies, perhaps even highest in the world, among countries that have meaningful data, at least. A major pretext for imprisonment has been the 'drug war,' which has very little to do with drugs, but quite a lot to do with social control: it eliminates people who are superfluous from the point of view of profit-making, and frightens the rest. These are natural concomitants of the neo-liberal programmes that have been instituted during the same years.

Contrary to propaganda, these programmes have had a harmful effect on the economy, and for much of the population, have meant lower wages, with family incomes sustained only with much higher work loads, now the highest in the industrial world. The famous 'fairy tale economy' is rather like that of third world countries: narrowly concentrated among privileged sectors. In poor countries, the problems of social control can be dealt with by violence: death squads and other devices. The rich countries are more civilized; the United States resorts to incarceration, which has a somewhat similar social role. It is worth taking note of the conclusions that would follow if prisoners were counted as part of the potential work force, as they should be – they are overwhelmingly poor (which in the United States means mostly black and Hispanic), and working-age males. If we add them to the unemployed, as of course we should, then the United States unemployment rate becomes close to the European average. It becomes considerably higher if we add to the total, as we should, the huge system of social control connected to incarceration: security forces, police, the criminal justice system, etc. Even prison construction has become a major industry. The United States system of reducing unemployment by low wages and benefits, and high worker insecurity – 'flexible labour markets' in technical terminology – is mostly fraud, a fact that should be of some interest to those who are urged to follow the same wonderful course.

Do you think that words like optimism and pessimism still make sense? Are spiritualism and materialism categories able to explain something?

Noam Chomsky: It always makes sense, in my opinion, to adopt Gramsci's famous slogan, which he borrowed from Romain Rolland and constantly reiterated: we should have 'pessimism of the intellect, and optimism of the will.' The concepts definitely make sense, and I think that is how we should use them.

As for spiritualism and materialism, I think there is a good deal of misunderstanding. There once was a significant concept of materialism, but it was destroyed by Newton, to his great dismay, when he discovered what he considered an 'absurdity': that the world is not a machine. To the end of his life, he sought to overcome the absurdity, but in vain. Leading scientists of his day, and long after, also regarded it as an absurdity and sought to overcome the problem, but also without success. Finally, the absurdity was incorporated into 'scientific common sense,' along with numerous others that followed. It finally became clear that the world is simply not intelligible to us in the manner expected by Galileo and the early modern scientific revolution, and that we have to construct the best theories we can, giving up earlier hopes. As that process continued, materialism disappeared, at least in any traditional sense. That has been recognized in standard scholarship in history of science for a long time: in the classic 19th study of materialism by Friedrich Lange, for example. Accordingly, it is hard to say anything about 'materialism.'

And about 'spiritualism,' even less. Personally, at least, I have no clear idea of what the term is supposed to mean.

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