



Chomsky at Har Homa

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Interview with Noam Chomsky

Israel in Global Context

Professor Noam Chomsky visited Israel-Palestine in early June. He lectured at various venues marking 30 years of Occupation. Dr. Ludwig Watzal, a member of Challenge's advisory board, interviewed Professor Noam Chomsky on June 9, 1997 at Ben-Gurion University in Beersheba, Israel.

Q: Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, everyone is talking about globalization. Is there a connection between the two? And is globalization really a new phenomenon?

The phenomenon of globalization has nothing to do with the collapse of the Soviet Union. It began in the 70s when the old international finance system came apart. It reached its climax with the disarmament talks between the US and the Soviet Union in the early 80s.

Q: Did the Western, capitalist countries need Communism as a bogey?

I think so. If you go back 500 years, you see that both Western and Eastern Europe were at about the same stage of development. The West began to

industrialize, while the East remained the service sector. This gap persists till today. In fact, it is bigger than ever. A few states like the Czech Republic will manage to climb up out of this category. Others like Bulgaria will only get more deeply bogged down in it.

Q: Do we need a new "enemy"? Does Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Cultures* offer a blueprint for this? How useful is his concept?

Let's take as an example the most fundamentalist Moslem country and see if the West stands in a hostile relation to it: Saudi Arabia. Or the biggest Moslem country: Indonesia. Does the West want to destroy it? Not in the least. On the contrary, it supplies it with weapons. Or Hekmatiar in Afghanistan. One of the most extreme fundamentalists anywhere. Both the US and Saudi Arabia have supported him massively with weapons and money.

The role of the US in Latin America was similar. Did it support the Catholic Church there, or has it rather aided the build-up of state-supported terrorist groups, in order to have them assassinate an archbishop (Archbishop

Romero in El Salvador—Ed) and other leading Jesuits? We must pose these questions if we are interested in learning the facts. On the other hand, if you prefer to raise your prestige with intellectuals, you can also talk about the "clash of cultures."

Q: Huntington was always a status-quo-oriented professor. How realistic is his concept of the future of the international system?

There is some truth in what he says. In 1958 John Foster Dulles sat before the national security council of the US and talked about three crisis points: Indonesia, North Africa and the Middle East. All Islamic states. You could already have written an article then about the "clash of cultures," but this clash did not take place. These regions were seen as problematic, because there was an independent national movement there. The real problem is a nationalism that aims toward independence.

Q: What is the guiding concept behind American interests and policy?

The most influential factors are of course domestic. The central interest is to maintain the functioning of the multinational companies and their profits. Another is to maintain the industrial and free-trade system. Both are the foundation for profit-oriented investments. The US also makes sure that the rest of the world plays the role assigned to it. Generally speaking: to guarantee free access to raw materials, cheap labor and unlimited possibilities for investment.

Q: What role does Israel play in the US view?

Exactly the role the US National Security Council assigned it in 1958, namely, to be a bulwark against Arab nationalism. Israel was chosen because it is a dependable base for Western dominance in this region. In the 60s this became reality. The Americans feared the effects of Egyptian nationalism on Saudi Arabia's stability, with a

consequent threat to American oil interests. The war of June 1967 dealt a severe blow to this struggle for independence. The event proved pivotal for Israeli-American relations. Israel became a virtual appendage of the US, in other words, another American "ally," to which the US could turn whenever it wanted a task accomplished.

Q: What role is assigned to the Palestinians in this American strategy?

The Palestinians find themselves on the same level as the Kurds or the people in the slums of Cairo. They don't contribute anything significant to the maintenance of the system. In the Palestinians' case it is actually worse, because they have a negative value. Their legitimate claims contribute to the growth of Arab nationalism. The Americans rule over the Middle East the way the British did earlier. It is the same imperial model. The British operated through an Arab facade of local notables who regulated daily life. These notables were weak and dependent. They had to be protected from their own people. In the background the British were pulling the strings, just as the Americans do now. They take care that nothing goes awry.

Q: Do you see a lasting solution to the bilateral conflict in the Oslo agreement? Or is it just an instrument of power, which aims to get rid of the Palestinian problem?

The concept here is pure power-politics. Since 1971 the US has refused to consider any political solution to the conflict. It no longer insists on a total withdrawal from the Occupied Territories. By its veto power in the UN Security Council, and by its steadfast refusals in the General Assembly, it has blocked everything that was not in Israel's interest. This attitude reached its highest expression in one sentence by George Bush after the second Gulf War, "What we say, goes." At Madrid too the US forced its will, and this con-

tinued into the Oslo process.

Does it deserve to be described as a "peace process"? Hitler's campaign to conquer Europe was also dubbed a "peace process." The "homelands" in South Africa were part of a "peace process." There are all kinds of peace processes. But it doesn't take long to discover what kind of peace process is unfolding here. You just have to take a look at the area around Jerusalem or spend an hour in Gaza. Everything is written in the agreement. When Netanyahu claims that the building of settlements is in accordance with Oslo II, he is absolutely right.

Q: So what does the future hold for the Palestinians?

It depends on what happens in Palestine, Israel or White society. If some of the Whites hadn't supported the African National Congress, the movement would have been completely destroyed. It is no natural law that the US must always take reactionary positions. There are influential forces in the US who are doing what they can to get a peaceful resolution of the conflict. At the moment they do not have the upper hand.

Q: Does Zionism have anything to do with the fate of the Palestinians?

This is a very complex problem. It depends what you mean by Zionism. I was a Zionist activist in my youth. For me, Zionism meant ~~opposition~~ to a Jewish state. The Zionist movement did not come out officially in favor of a Jewish state until 1942. Before this it was merely the intent of the Zionist leadership. The Zionist movement for a long time stood against the establishment of a Jewish state, because such a state would be discriminatory and racist.

Q: Can Germany and the other Europeans challenge the US's global domination?

They are already challenging it in Asia. Because of their history and their spheres of interest, this could also hap-

pen in the Middle East. What takes place here affects Europe more than the USA. The Americans are deliberately destroying what is left of the Palestinian economy. Under Israeli occupation there was no development whatsoever. Israel's policies were even more repressive than Britain's. In enlightened self-interest the Europeans ought to compensate for this. They ought to insist that the Palestinian Authority improve the lot of the suffering population. The Europeans have, over the years, always spoken up for the Palestinians' right to self-determination. They should do so again.

Q: What does the world look like at the end of this century? Who are the winners, who are the losers?

The gap between rich and poor has consistently widened since the 60s; the main contributor to this has been the growth of population. Inequality and poverty between countries has increased. Social peace has come ever more into question. One can say this much for globalization: it has marginalized the Third World. In these countries a tiny, privileged elite lives side by side with abject poverty. The gap is getting worse, because the rich lands are clamping down on social welfare policies. They justify this clamp-down by referring to the demands of the marketplace, which is utter nonsense. No country in the world believes in the marketplace. All practice protectionism. The US has always led the way in this respect. The most developed sectors of the US economy depend heavily on governmental subsidies. Many firms cannot survive without them. The governments provide substantial support to big industrial firms, and this has nothing to do with free market forces. Protectionism leads to greater inequality, more suffering and bigger profits. There is nothing in nature that requires such a policy. Whether it keeps on going depends primarily on political decisions. ■

(Translated from German by Sumana Ramanan)