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We Own The World

Noam Chomsky

January 1, 2008

You all know, of course, there was an election — what is called “an election” in the United States — last November. There was really one issue in the election, what to do about U.S. forces in Iraq and there was, by U.S. standards, an overwhelming vote calling for a withdrawal of U.S. forces on a firm timetable.

As few people know, a couple of months earlier there were extensive polls in Iraq, U.S.-run polls, with interesting results. They were not secret here. If you really looked you could find references to them, so it’s not that they were concealed. This poll found that two-thirds of the people in Baghdad wanted the U.S. troops out immediately; the rest of the country — a large majority — wanted a firm timetable for withdrawal, most of them within a year or less.

The figures are higher for Arab Iraq in the areas where troops were actually deployed. A very large majority felt that the presence of U.S. forces increased the level of violence and a remarkable 60 percent for all of Iraq, meaning higher in the areas where the troops are deployed, felt that U.S. forces were legitimate targets of attack. So there was a considerable consensus between Iraqis and Americans on what should be done

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in Iraq, namely troops should be withdrawn either immediately or with a firm timetable.

Well, the reaction in the post-election U.S. government to that consensus was to violate public opinion and increase the troop presence by maybe 30,000 to 50,000. Predictably, there was a pretext announced. It was pretty obvious what it was going to be. "There is outside interference in Iraq, which we have to defend the Iraqis against. The Iranians are interfering in Iraq." Then came the alleged evidence about finding IEDs, roadside bombs with Iranian markings, as well as Iranian forces in Iraq. "What can we do? We have to escalate to defend Iraq from the outside intervention."

Then came the "debate." We are a free and open society, after all, so we have "lively" debates. On the one side were the hawks who said, "The Iranians are interfering, we have to bomb them." On the other side were the doves who said, "We cannot be sure the evidence is correct, maybe you misread the serial numbers or maybe it is just the revolutionary guards and not the government."

So we had the usual kind of debate going on, which illustrates a very important and pervasive distinction between several types of propaganda systems. To take the ideal types, exaggerating a little: totalitarian states' propaganda is that you better accept it, or else. And "or else" can be of various consequences, depending on the nature of the state. People can actually believe whatever they want as long as they obey. Democratic societies use a different method: they don't articulate the party line. That's a mistake. What they do is presuppose it, then encourage vigorous debate within the framework of the party line. This serves two purposes. For one thing it gives the impression of a free and open society because, after all, we have lively debate. It also instills a propaganda line that becomes something you presuppose, like the air you breathe.

That was the case here. This is a classic illustration. The whole debate about the Iranian "interference" in Iraq makes

is the primary way to prevent unpopular ideas from being expressed.

The ideas of the overwhelming majority of the population, who don't attend Harvard, Princeton, Oxford and Cambridge, enable them to react like human beings, as they often do. There is a lesson there for activists.

sense only on one assumption, namely, that "we own the world." If we own the world, then the only question that can arise is that someone else is interfering in a country we have invaded and occupied.

So if you look over the debate that took place and is still taking place about Iranian interference, no one points out this is insane. How can Iran be interfering in a country that we invaded and occupied? It's only appropriate on the presupposition that we own the world. Once you have that established in your head, the discussion is perfectly sensible.

You read a lot of comparisons now about Vietnam and Iraq. For the most part they are totally incomparable; the nature and purpose of the war, almost everything is totally different except in one respect: how they are perceived in the United States. In both cases there is what is now sometimes called the "Q" word, quagmire. Is it a quagmire? In Vietnam it is now recognized that it was a quagmire. There is a debate of whether Iraq, too, is a quagmire. In other words, is it costing us too much? That is the question you can debate.

So in the case of Vietnam, there was a debate. Not at the beginning — in fact, there was so little discussion in the beginning that nobody even remembers when the war began — 1962, if you're interested. That's when the U.S. attacked Vietnam. But there was no discussion, no debate, nothing.

By the mid-1960s, mainstream debate began. And it was the usual range of opinions between the hawks and the doves. The hawks said if we send more troops, we can win. The doves, well, Arthur Schlesinger, famous historian, Kennedy's advisor, in his book in 1966 said that we all pray that the hawks will be right and that the current escalation of troops, which by then was approaching half a million, will work and bring us victory. If it does, we will all be praising the wisdom and statesmanship of the American government for winning victory — in a land that we're reducing to ruin and wreck.

You can translate that word by word to the doves today. We all pray that the surge will work. If it does, contrary to our expectations, we will be praising the wisdom and statesmanship of the Bush administration in a country, which, if we're honest, is a total ruin, one of the worst disasters in military history for the population.

If you get way to the left end of mainstream discussion, you get somebody like Anthony Lewis who, at the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, wrote in retrospect that the war began with benign intentions to do good; that is true by definition, because it's us, after all. So it began with benign intentions, but by 1969, he said, it was clear that the war was a mistake. For us to win a victory would be too costly — for us — so it was a mistake and we should withdraw. That was the most extreme criticism.

Very much like today. We could withdraw from Vietnam because the U.S. had already essentially obtained its objective by then. Iraq we can't because we haven't obtained our objectives.

And for those of you who are old enough to remember — or have read about it — you will note that the peace movement pretty much bought that line. Just like the mainstream discussion, the opposition of the war, including the peace movement, was mostly focused on the bombing of the North. When the U.S. started bombing the North regularly in February 1965, it also escalated the bombing of the South to triple the scale — and the South had already been attacked for three years by then. A couple of hundred thousand South Vietnamese were killed and thousands, if not tens of the thousands, had been driven into concentration camps. The U.S. had been carrying out chemical warfare to destroy food crops and ground cover. By 1965 South Vietnam was already a total wreck.

Bombing the South was costless for the United States because the South had no defense. Bombing the North was costly — you bomb the North, you bomb the harbor, you might hit Russian ships, which begins to become dangerous. You're bombing an internal Chinese railroad — the Chinese railroads from

military capacity — with 400 missiles, which could be nuclear armed. Then we had a debate about whether that proves China is trying to conquer the world or the numbers are wrong, or something.

Just a little footnote. How many offensive nuclear armed missiles does the United States have? Well, it turns out to be 10,000. China may now have maybe 400, if you believe the hawks. That proves that they are trying to conquer the world.

It turns out, if you read the international press closely, that the reason China is building up its military capacity is not only because of U.S. aggressiveness all over the place, but the fact that the United States has improved its targeting capacities so it can now destroy missile sites in a much more sophisticated fashion wherever they are, even if they are mobile. So who is trying to conquer the world? Well, obviously the Chinese because since we own it, they are trying to conquer it.

It's all too easy to continue with this indefinitely. Just pick your topic. It's a good exercise to try. This simple principle, "we own the world," is sufficient to explain a lot of the discussion about foreign affairs.

I will just finish with a word from George Orwell. In the introduction to *Animal Farm* he said, England is a free society, but it's not very different from the totalitarian monster I have been describing. He says in England unpopular ideas can be suppressed without the use of force. Then he goes on to give some dubious examples. At the end he turns to a very brief explanation, actually two sentences, but they are to the point. He says, one reason is the press is owned by wealthy men who have every reason not to want certain ideas to be expressed. And the second reason — and I think a more important one — is a good education. If you have gone to the best schools and graduated from Oxford and Cambridge, and so on, you have instilled in you the understanding that there are certain things it would not do to say; actually, it would not do to think. That

trum of discussion here. The Chinese have been trying to block it and that is well understood. You read the most respectable journal in the world, I suppose, the *Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, and you find leading strategic analysts, John Steinbrunner and Nancy Gallagher, a couple of years ago, warning that the Bush administration's aggressive militarization is leading to what they call "ultimate doom." Of course, there is going to be a reaction to it. You threaten people with destruction, they are going to react. These analysts call on peace-loving nations to counter Bush's aggressive militarism. They hope that China will lead peace-loving nations to counter U.S. aggressiveness. It's a pretty remarkable comment on the impossibility of achieving democracy in the United States. Again, the logic is pretty elementary. Steinbrunner and Gallagher are assuming that the United States cannot be a democratic society; it's not one of the options, so therefore we hope that maybe China will do something.

Well, China finally did something. It signaled to the United States that they noticed that we were trying to use space for military purposes, so China shot down one of their satellites. Everyone understands why — the militarization and weaponization of space depends on satellites. While missiles are very difficult or maybe impossible to stop, satellites are very easy to shoot down. You know where they are. So China is saying, "Okay, we understand you are militarizing space. We're going to counter it not by militarizing space, we can't compete with you that way, but by shooting down your satellites." That is what was behind the satellite shooting. Every military analyst certainly understood it and every lay person can understand it. But take a look at the debate. The discussion was about, "Is China trying to conquer the world by shooting down one of its own satellites?"

About a year ago there was a new rash of articles and headlines on the front page about the "Chinese military build-up." The Pentagon claimed that China had increased its offensive

southeast to southwest China happen to go through North Vietnam — who knows what they might do.

In fact, the Chinese were accused, correctly, of sending Chinese forces into Vietnam, namely to rebuild the railroad that we were bombing. So that was "interference" with our divine right to bomb North Vietnam. So most of the focus was on the bombing of the North. The peace movement slogan, "Stop the bombing" meant the bombing of the North.

In 1967 the leading specialist on Vietnam, Bernard Fall, a military historian and the only specialist on Vietnam respected by the U.S. government — who was a hawk, incidentally, but who cared about the Vietnamese — wrote that it's a question of whether Vietnam will survive as a cultural and historical entity under the most severe bombing that has ever been applied to a country this size. He was talking about the South. He kept emphasizing it was the South that was being attacked. But that didn't matter because it was costless, therefore it's fine to continue. That is the range of debate, which only makes sense on the assumption that we own the world.

If you read, say, the Pentagon Papers, it turns out there was extensive planning about the bombing of the North — very detailed, meticulous planning on just how far it can go, what happens if we go a little too far, and so on. There is no discussion at all about the bombing of the South, virtually none. Just an occasional announcement, okay, we will triple the bombing, or something like that.

If you read Robert McNamara's memoirs of the war — by that time he was considered a leading dove — he reviews the meticulous planning about the bombing of the North, but does not even mention his decision to sharply escalate the bombing of the South at the same time that the bombing of the North was begun.

I should say, incidentally, that with regard to Vietnam what I have been discussing is articulate opinion, including the leading part of the peace movement. There is also public opinion,

which it turns out is radically different, and that is of some significance. By 1969 around 70 percent of the public felt that the war was not a mistake, but that it was fundamentally wrong and immoral. That was the wording of the polls and that figure remains fairly constant up until the most recent polls just a few years ago. The figures are pretty remarkable because people who say that in a poll almost certainly think, I must be the only person in the world that thinks this. They certainly did not read it anywhere, they did not hear it anywhere. But that was popular opinion.

The same is true with regard to many other issues. But for articulate opinion it's pretty much the way I've described — largely vigorous debate between the hawks and the doves, all on the unexpressed assumption that we own the world. So the only thing that matters is how much is it costing us, or maybe for some more humane types, are we harming too many of them?

Getting back to the election, there was a lot of disappointment among anti-war people — the majority of the population — that Congress did not pass any withdrawal legislation. There was a Democratic resolution that was vetoed, but if you look at the resolution closely it was not a withdrawal resolution. There was a good analysis of it by General Kevin Ryan, who was a fellow at the Kennedy School at Harvard. He went through it and he said it really should be called a re-missioning proposal. It leaves about the same number of American troops, but they have a slightly different mission.

He said, first of all it allows for a national security exception. If the president says there is a national security issue, he can do whatever he wants — end of resolution. The second gap is it allows for anti-terrorist activities. Okay, that is whatever you like. Third, it allows for training Iraqi forces. Again, anything you like.

Next it says troops have to remain for protection of U.S. forces and facilities. What are U.S. forces? Well, U.S. forces

remarkable event took place. I was kind of shocked, frankly. Gorbachev agreed to let Germany be unified, meaning join the West and be militarized within a hostile military alliance. This is Germany, which twice in that century practically destroyed Russia. That's a pretty remarkable agreement.

There was a quid pro quo. Then-president George Bush I agreed that NATO would not expand to the East. The Russians also demanded, but did not receive, an agreement for a nuclear-free zone from the Arctic to the Baltic, which would give them a little protection from nuclear attack. That was the agreement in 1990. Then Bill Clinton came into office, the so-called liberal. One of the first things he did was to rescind the agreement, unilaterally, and expand NATO to the East.

For the Russians that's pretty serious, if you remember the history. They lost 25 million people in the last World War and over 3 million in World War I. But since the U.S. owns the world, if we want to threaten Russia, that is fine. It is all for freedom and justice, after all, and if they make unpleasant noises about it we wonder why they are so paranoid. Why is Putin screaming as if we're somehow threatening them, since we can't be threatening anyone, owning the world.

One of the other big issues on the front pages now is Chinese "aggressiveness." There is a lot of concern about the fact that the Chinese are building up their missile forces. Is China planning to conquer the world? Big debates about it. Well, what is really going on? For years China has been in the lead in trying to prevent the militarization of space. If you look at the debates and the Disarmament Commission of the UN General Assembly, the votes are 160 to 1 or 2. The U.S. insists on the militarization of space. It will not permit the outer space treaty to explicitly bar military relations in space.

Clinton's position was that the U.S. should control space for military purposes. The Bush administration is more extreme. Their position is the U.S. should own space, their words, We have to own space for military purposes. So that is the spec-

installed a brutal tyrant, the Shah, and kept supporting him while he compiled one of the worst human rights records in the world — torture, assassination, anything you like. In fact, President Carter, when he visited Iran in December 1978, praised the Shah because of the love shown to him by his people, and so on and so forth, which probably accelerated the overthrow. Of course, Iranians have this odd way of remembering what happened to them and who was behind it. When the Shah was overthrown, the Carter administration immediately tried to instigate a military coup by sending arms to Iran through Israel to try to support military force to overthrow the government. We immediately turned to supporting Iraq, that is Saddam Hussein, and his invasion of Iran. Saddam was executed for crimes he committed in 1982, by his standards not very serious crimes — complicity in killing 150 people. Well, there was something missing in that account — 1982 is a very important year in U.S./Iraqi relations. That is the year in which Ronald Reagan removed Iraq from the list of states supporting terrorism so that the U.S. could start supplying Iraq with weapons for its invasion of Iran, including the means to develop weapons of mass destruction, chemical and nuclear weapons. That is 1982. A year later Donald Rumsfeld was sent to firm up the deal. Well, Iranians may very well remember that this led to a war in which hundreds of thousands of them were slaughtered with U.S. aid going to Iraq. They may well remember that the year after the war was over, in 1989, the U.S. government invited Iraqi nuclear engineers to come to the United States for advanced training in developing nuclear weapons.

What about the Russians? They have a history too. One part of the history is that in the last century Russia was invaded and practically destroyed three times through Eastern Europe. You can look back and ask, when was the last time that the U.S. was invaded and practically destroyed through Canada or Mexico? That doesn't happen. We crush others and we are always safe. But the Russians don't have that luxury. Now, in 1990 a

are those embedded in Iraqi armed units where 60 percent of their fellow soldiers think that they — U.S. troops, that is — are legitimate targets of attack. Incidentally, those figures keep going up, so they are probably higher by now. Well, okay, that is plenty of force protection. What facilities need protection was not explained in the Democratic resolution, but facilities include what is called “the embassy.” The U.S. embassy in Iraq is nothing like any embassy that has ever existed in history. It's a city inside the green zone, the protected region of Iraq, that the U.S. runs. It's got everything from missiles to McDonalds, anything you want. They didn't build that huge facility because they intend to leave.

That is one facility, but there are others. There are “semi-permanent military bases,” which are being built around the country. “Semi-permanent” means permanent, as long as we want.

General Ryan omitted a lot of things. He omitted the fact that the U.S. is maintaining control of logistics and logistics is the core of a modern Army. Right now about 80 percent of the supply is coming in though the south, from Kuwait, and it's going through guerilla territory, easily subject to attack, which means you have to have plenty of troops to maintain that supply line. Plus, of course, it keeps control over the Iraqi Army.

The Democratic resolution excludes the Air Force. The Air Force does whatever it wants. It is bombing pretty regularly and it can bomb more intensively. The resolution also excludes mercenaries, which is no small number — sources such as the Wall Street Journal estimate the number of mercenaries at about 130,000, approximately the same as the number of troops, which makes some sense. The traditional way to fight a colonial war is with mercenaries, not with your own soldiers — that is the French Foreign Legion, the British Gurkhas, or the Hessians in the Revolutionary War. That is part of the main reason the draft was dropped — so you get professional soldiers, not people you pick off the streets.

So, yes, it is re-missioning, but the resolution was vetoed because it was too strong, so we don't even have that. And, yes, that did disappoint a lot of people. However, it would be too strong to say that no high official in Washington called for immediate withdrawal. There were some. The strongest one I know of — when asked what is the solution to the problem in Iraq — said it's quite obvious, "Withdraw all foreign forces and withdraw all foreign arms." That official was Condoleeza Rice and she was not referring to U.S. forces, she was referring to Iranian forces and Iranian arms. And that makes sense, too, on the assumption that we own the world because, since we own the world U.S. forces cannot be foreign forces anywhere. So if we invade Iraq or Canada, say, we are the indigenous forces. It's the Iranians that are foreign forces.

I waited for a while to see if anyone, at least in the press or journals, would point out that there was something funny about this. I could not find a word. I think everyone regarded that as a perfectly sensible comment. But I could not see a word from anyone who said, wait a second, there are foreign forces there, 150,000 American troops, plenty of American arms.

So it is reasonable that when British sailors were captured in the Gulf by Iranian forces, there was debate, "Were they in Iranian borders or in Iraqi borders? Actually there is no answer to this because there is no territorial boundary, and that was pointed out. It was taken for granted that if the British sailors were in Iraqi waters, then Iran was guilty of a crime by intervening in foreign territory. But Britain is not guilty of a crime by being in Iraqi territory, because Britain is a U.S. client state, and we own the world, so they are there by right.

What about the possible next war, Iran? There have been very credible threats by the U.S. and Israel — essentially a U.S. client — to attack Iran. There happens to be something called the UN Charter which says that — in Article 2 — the threat or use of force in international affairs is a crime. "Threat or use of force."

weapon against them. Then they said it is kind of irrelevant anyway because it is directed against Iran, not against Russia.

Okay, that was the end of the discussion. So, point one, missile defense is a first-strike weapon; second, it's directed against Iran. Now, you can carry out a small exercise in logic. Does anything follow from those two assumptions? Yes, what follows is it's a first-strike weapon against Iran. Since the U.S. owns the world what could be wrong with having a first-strike weapon against Iran. So the conclusion is not mentioned. It is not necessary. It follows from the fact that we own the world.

Maybe a year ago or so, Germany sold advanced submarines to Israel, which were equipped to carry missiles with nuclear weapons. Why does Israel need submarines with nuclear armed missiles? Well, there is only one imaginable reason and everyone in Germany with a brain must have understood that — certainly their military system does — it's a first-strike weapon against Iran. Israel can use German subs to illustrate to Iranians that if they respond to an Israeli attack they will be vaporized.

The fundamental premises of Western imperialism are extremely deep. The West owns the world and now the U.S. runs the West, so, of course, they go along. The fact that they are providing a first-strike weapon for attacking Iran probably, I'm guessing now, raised no comment because why should it?

You can forget about history, it does not matter, it's kind of "old fashioned," boring stuff we don't need to know about. But most countries pay attention to history. So, for example, for the United States there is no discussion of the history of U.S./Iranian relations. Well, for the U.S. there is only one event in Iranian history — in 1979 Iranians overthrew the tyrant that the U.S. was backing and took some hostages for over a year. That happened and they had to be punished for that.

But for Iranians their history is that for over 50 years, literally without a break, the U.S. has been torturing Iranians. In 1953 the U.S. overthrew the parliamentary government and

true, but it was a quote from Obama, who is the hope of the liberal doves, in which he allegedly said that the spectrum of discussion in the United States extends between two crazy extremes, Rush Limbaugh and NPR. The truth, he said, is in the middle and that is where he is going to be, in the middle, between the crazies.

NPR then had a discussion — it was like being at the Harvard faculty club — serious people, educated, no grammatical errors, who know what they're talking about, usually polite. The discussion was about the so-called missile defense system that the U.S. is trying to place in Czechoslovakia and Poland — and the Russian reaction. The main issue was, "What is going on with the Russians? Why are they acting so hostile and irrational? Are they trying to start a new Cold War? There is something wrong with those guys. Can we calm them down and make them less paranoid?"

The main specialist they called in, I think from the Pentagon or somewhere, pointed out, accurately, that a missile defense system is essentially a first-strike weapon. That is well known by strategic analysts on all sides. If you think about it for a minute, it's obvious why. A missile defense system is never going to stop a first strike, but it could, in principle, if it ever worked, stop a retaliatory strike. If you attack some country with a first strike, and practically wipe it out, if you have a missile defense system, and prevent them from retaliating, then you would be protected, or partially protected. If a country has a functioning missile defense system it will have more options for carrying out a first strike. Okay, obvious, and not a secret. It's known to every strategic analyst. I can explain it to my grandchildren in two minutes and they understand it.

So on NPR it is agreed that a missile defense system is a first-strike weapon. But then comes the second part of the discussion. Well, say the pundits, the Russians should not be worried about this. For one thing because it's not enough of a system to stop their retaliation, so therefore it's not yet a first-strike

Does anybody care? No, because we're an outlaw state by definition, or to be more precise, our threats and use of force are not foreign, they're indigenous because we own the world. Therefore, it's fine. So there are threats to bomb Iran — maybe we will and maybe we won't. That is the debate that goes on. Is it legitimate if we decide to do it? People might argue it's a mistake. But does anyone say it would be illegitimate? For example, the Democrats in Congress refuse to put in an amendment that would require the Executive to inform Congress if it intends to bomb Iran — to consult, inform. Even that was not accepted.

The whole world is aghast at this possibility. It would be monstrous. A leading British military historian, Correlli Barnett, wrote recently that if the U.S. does attack, or Israel does attack, it would be World War III. The attack on Iraq has been horrendous enough. Apart from devastating Iraq, the UN High Commission on Refugees reviewed the number of displaced people — they estimate 4.2 million, over 2 million fled the country, another 2 million fleeing within the country. That is in addition to the numbers killed, which if you extrapolate from the last studies, are probably approaching a million.

It was anticipated by U.S. intelligence and other intelligence agencies and independent experts that an attack on Iraq would probably increase the threat of terror and nuclear proliferation. But that went way beyond what anyone expected. Well known terrorism specialists Peter Bergen and Paul Cruickshank estimated — using mostly government statistics — that what they call "the Iraq effect" increased terror by a factor of seven, and that is pretty serious. And that gives you an indication of the ranking of protection of the population in the priority list of leaders. It's very low.

So what would the Iran effect be? Well, that is incalculable. It could be World War III. Very likely a massive increase in terror, who knows what else. Even in the states right around Iraq, which don't like Iran — Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey

— even there the large majority would prefer to see a nuclear armed Iran to any U.S. military action, and they are right, military action could be devastating. It doesn't mean we won't do it. There is very little discussion here of the illegitimacy of doing it, again on the assumption that anything we do is legitimate, it just might cost too much.

Is there a possible solution to the U.S./Iran crisis? Well, there are some plausible solutions. One possibility would be an agreement that allows Iran to have nuclear energy, like every signer of the non-proliferation treaty, but not to have nuclear weapons. In addition, it would call for a nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East. That would include Iran, Israel, which has hundreds of nuclear weapons, and any U.S. or British forces deployed in the region. A third element of a solution would be for the United States and other nuclear states to obey their legal obligation, by unanimous agreement of the World Court, to make good-faith moves to eliminate nuclear weapons entirely.

Is this feasible? Well, it's feasible on one assumption, that the United States and Iran become functioning democratic societies, because what I have just quoted happens to be the opinion of the overwhelming majority of the populations in Iran and the United States. On everything that I mentioned there is an overwhelming majority. So, yes, there would be a very feasible solution if these two countries were functioning democratic societies, meaning societies in which public opinion has some kind of effect on policy. The problem in the United States is the inability of organizers to do something in a population that overwhelmingly agrees with them and to make that current policy. Of course, it can be done. Peasants in Bolivia can do it, we can obviously do it here.

Can we do anything to make Iran a more democratic society? Not directly, but indirectly we can. We can pay attention to the dissidents and the reformists in Iran who are struggling courageously to turn Iran into a more democratic society. And

we know exactly what they are saying, they are very outspoken about it. They are pleading with the United States to withdraw the threats against Iran. The more we threaten Iran, the more we give a gift to the reactionary, religious fanatics in the government. You make threats, you strengthen them. That is exactly what is happening. The threats have led to repression, predictably.

Now the Americans claim they are outraged by the repression, which we should protest, but we should recognize that the repression is the direct and predictable consequence of the actions that the U.S. government is taking. So if you take actions, and then they have predictable consequences, condemning the consequences is total hypocrisy.

Incidentally, in the case of Cuba about two-thirds of Americans think we ought to end the embargo and all threats and enter into diplomatic relations. And that has been true ever since polls have been taken — for about 30 years. The figure varies, but it's roughly there. Zero effect on policy, in Iran, Cuba, and elsewhere.

So there is a problem and that problem is that the United States is just not a functioning democracy. Public opinion does not matter and among articulate and elite opinion that is a principle — it shouldn't matter. The only principle that matters is we own the world and the rest of you shut up, you know, whether you're abroad or at home.

So, yes, there is a potential solution to the very dangerous problem, it's essentially the same solution: do something to turn our own country into a functioning democracy. But that is in radical opposition to the fundamental presupposition of all elite discussions, mainly that we own the world and that these questions don't arise and the public should have no opinion on foreign policy, or any policy.

Once, when I was driving to work, I was listening to NPR. NPR is supposed to be the kind of extreme radical end of the spectrum. I read a statement somewhere, I don't know if it's