

By: Noam Chomsky



A public event on the occasion of the 30th Anniversary of the bombing of Cubana airliner, flight 455, which cost the lives of 73 passengers, was held on October 6th, 2006, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), in Boston. Participating in this event were political activist and analyst Noam Chomsky, Cuban specialist and French scholar Salim Lamrani and the President of the National Lawyer's Guild, Michael Avery, for a discussion of US foreign policy towards Cuba and Latin America, and the cases of Luis Posada Carriles and the Cuban Five.

The following is Noam Chomsky's response to a question from the audience:

**Audience Member:** With the recent integration and cooperation between Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia, obviously the US is paying more attention to these countries. What in your opinion could be the agenda of secret agents currently in action in Venezuela? And could you please analyze the possibility of military intervention in Venezuela and Bolivia on the part of the US government.

**Noam Chomsky:** I think your point is well taken. We know that the US did support a military coup, which briefly overthrew President Chavez and the US had to back down, when he was restored quickly and also had to back down in the face of a very angry reaction in Latin American. In almost all of Latin America, there was a very angry reaction. They take democracy there more seriously than we do here.

Right after trying to overthrow the government by force, the US immediately

turned to subversion, supporting anti-Chavez groups. That's described in the press, the way it's described is, the US is supporting pro-democracy groups, which are opposed to President Chavez.

Notice it's true by definition that if you oppose the president, you are pro-democracy. It's completely irrelevant that according to the best polls (Latin America has very good polling agencies which take regular polls on these issues around the continent). Support for democracy has been declining—not for democracy but for the democratic governments—has been declining through Latin America, for a pretty good reason, the governments have been associated with neo-liberal programs which undermine democracy—IMF, treasury department programs—so your support for the governments are declining. There are exceptions, and the major exception by far is Venezuela.

Since 1998, when Chavez was elected, support for the elected government as be rising very fast, it's now by far the highest in Latin America. He has won several elections that have been recognized to be free and fair, he has won numerous referendums, but he is a dictator, a tin-pot dictator, which is proven by the fact that our dear leader said so, and since we are voluntary North Koreans, when the dear leader says it, it's true. So therefore, he's a dictator, and if you carry out subversion to overthrow him, that's pro-democracy by definition. You have to look hard to find an exception to this or even a comment on it, just like the other examples I discussed.

We might ask ourselves how we would react if Iran, say, had just supported a military coup that overthrew the government in the United States and when they have to back off from that, immediately turned to supporting pro-democracy groups in the United States that are opposed to the government. Would we give them ice-cream and candy?

Well in dictatorial Venezuela, they let them keep functioning. In fact, even let the newspapers in support of the coup keep functioning. I could go on with this, but what's likely to happen?

Well, the US has had two major weapons for controlling Latin America for a long time. One of them is economic controls, the other is military force. They have both been used continually. Both of them are weakening and it's a very serious problem for U.S. planners.

The Economic, for the first time in its history since the Spanish colonization, Latin America is beginning to get its act together. It's moving towards some degree of independence, even some degree of integration. The Latin American countries have been very separate from one another through their histories, they have a huge gap between the very rich and the huge massive poor, so when we are talking about the countries, we are talking about the rich elites. The rich elites have been oriented towards Europe and North America, not their own citizens, not each other. So that Capital flight goes to Zurich, or London, or New York, the second home is in the Riviera, the children study in Cambridge or something like that. That's the way it's been, with very little interaction, and it's changing.

First of all there are major popular movements, like in Bolivia. They had a democratic election of the kind we can't even dream of. I mean if there was any honest newspaper coverage in this country we would be ashamed at the comparison between their election and ours. I won't go through it, but with a little thought you can quickly figure it out, because there is mass popular participation, and the people know what they are voting for, and they pick somebody from their own ranks and their major issues and so on. It's unimaginable here where elections are about the level of marketing toothpaste on television, literally.

There are mass popular movements all over and they have begun to integrate to some extent for the first time.

The military weapon has been weakened. The last effort of the US had to back off very quickly, in 2002 in Venezuela. The kinds of governments the US is now supporting—forced to support—are the kinds it would have been trying to overthrow not very long ago, because of this shift.

The economic weapon is weakening enormously. They are throwing out the IMF. The IMF means the US Treasury Department. Argentina, it was the poster boy of the IMF, you know, following all the rules and so on. It went in to a hideous economic crash. They managed to get out of it, but only by radically violating IMF rules, and they are now, as the President put it, "ridding themselves of the IMF" and paying off their debt with the help of Venezuela. Venezuela bought up a lot of their debt. The same is happening in Brazil. The same is going to happen in Bolivia.

In general, the economic measures are weakening; the military measures are no longer what they were. The US is deeply concerned about it, undoubtedly. We shouldn't think that the US has abandoned the military effort, on the contrary, the number of US personnel—military personnel—in Latin America is probably as high as its ever been. The number of the Latin American officers being trained by the US is going up very sharply. By now, for the first time (it never happened during the cold war) the US military aid is higher than the sum of economic and social aid from key federal agencies— that's a shift. There are more air bases all over the place.

Keep your eyes on Ecuador, there's an election coming up in about a week, the likely winner, [Rafael] Correa is an interesting person, he was recently asked what he would do with the big Manta US airbase in Ecuador and his answer was, well he'd allow it to stay if the United States agreed to have an Ecuadorian airbase in Miami.

But these are the things that are going on. There's a call for an Indian Nation for the first time. The indigenous—in some states like Bolivia—majority is actually entering the political arena for the first time in 500 years, electing their own candidates. These are major changes, but the US is certainly not giving up on it.

The Military training has been shifted. Its official focus now is on what's called radical populism and street gangs. Well, you know what radical populism means, like the Priests organizing peasants or anyone who gets out of line. So yeah, it's serious. What will they do? Governments have what are called security interests; they have to protect the national security. If any of you have ever spent any time reading declassified documents, you know what that means. I've spent a lot of time reading them and it's true, there is defense of the government against its enemy, that prime enemy. Its prime enemy is the domestic population. That's true of every government I know. So if you read the declassified documents, you find that most of them are protecting the government from its own population. Not much has to do with anything you might call security interests, in another sense, and that's true right now. So we don't know what they are planning because we have to be protected from knowing what the government is planning. So we have to speculate.

If you want my speculation, based on no information except what I would be doing if I was sitting in the Pentagon planning office and told to figure out a way to overthrow the governments of Bolivia, Venezuela, and Iran, in fact. The idea that immediately comes to mind, so I assume they are working on it, is to support secessionist movements, which is conceivable if you look at the geography and the places where the oil is and so on.

In Venezuela, the oil is in Zulia province, which is where the opposition candidate is coming from, right on the boarder of Colombia (one of the only states [in Latin America]

where the US has a firm military presence). It's a rich province, pretty anti-Chavez, and it happens to be where most of the oil is, and in fact there is rumor of a Zulia independence movement, which, if they can carry it off, the US could then intervene to protect against the dictator. That's Venezuela.

In Bolivia, the major gas resources are in the low-lands, the eastern low-lands, which is mostly European, not indigenous, opposed to the government, rich area, near Paraguay (one of the other countries where the US has military bases), so you can imagine the same project going on - also secessionist movements.

In Iran, which is the big one, if you look at it, the oil of the region (that's where most of the hydrocarbons in the world are) they are right around the gulf, the Shiite sections of Iraq, the Shiite sections of Saudi Arabia and an Arab—not Persian—region of Iran, Khuzestan, right near the Gulf, it happens to be Arab. There is talk floating around Europe (you know it's probably planted by the CIA) of an Ahwazi Liberation Movement for this region. A feasible, I don't know if it's feasible or not, but I think the kind of thought that would be occurring to the Pentagon planners is to sponsor a liberation movement, so-called, in the area near the Gulf then move in to defend it. They've got 150,000 troops in Iraq; presumably, you might try that, and then bomb the rest of the country back to the Stone Age. It's conceivable, I mean, I wouldn't be surprised if those are the kinds of plans that are being toyed with.

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society. Such a development would in fact help the pro-democracy movement, they expound. When a few women succeed in getting into the Majlis (Iran's Parliament) or senior government positions, this is not an indication of gender equality.

The key question is how this can be achieved. Should the goal of attaining full equality in all spheres be narrowed down? I do not think so.

Iran's feminist movement cannot limit its goal to just a few specific issues on equality and must ask for parity in all human spheres. The world must learn of this call of the Iranian woman and hear them say that they are against the discriminatory laws in their country.

We support all measures against stoning laws, but go a step further and demand full equality for men and women. If you believe in this as well, then you should visit [www.we-change.org](http://www.we-change.org) website and help others.

### Shirin Ebadi



#### The Campaign for Equality

For years the Western world has been trying to present a dark image of Iranian society and particularly the "Iranian woman." Sometimes laws such as stoning or executing people under 18 years of age help this image while at others the serial killings of destitute women who have been abandoned by their families because of the so-called "man's honor". Iranian intellectuals and thinkers have of course repeatedly that Iran cannot be judged mere by these events and that it is not fair to point the finger at these black spots. One of the most proud events in Iran is that women comprise 65 percent of its university population. In other words, Iranian women have become better educated than their compatriot men. In this regard grouping Iran with advanced European nations is a source of pride for Iran, but at the same time women are unhappy about the gender discrimination that they are subjected to in their own country and ask why. Why is it that in an accident in which a man and a women are

equality hurt, the compensation that a woman receives is half of the one that the man is awarded? Is being a woman a sin? Does human dignity depend on gender?

Educated Iranian women ask why do the country's laws discriminate against them and for example view two women witnesses equal one man witness. What is worse is that under certain situations where a male witness is not found for an event, a woman can face punishment by being flogged for being the only witness. Article 75 of the Islamic Punishment law provides that sexual relations between unmarried couples are punishable by flogging if two men and four men testify to it. Article 76 of the same law states that a woman's testimony alone does not prove that sexual relations have existed between a couple and the witness is punishable with 80 flogging slashes.

Questions like whether flogging is an acceptable method of punishment in the 21st century have been raised by Iranian women for years who have demonstrated their protest to such discriminatory regulations. They have used every opportunity to speak against such inequality. At times they have protested the stoning of a woman, at others the marriage of an underage girl and still at others the family protection laws.

Yes, the Iranian woman has been protesting every day of her life against these discriminatory conditions and there has been just one demand they have been making: Equality in laws between men and women in Iran. This call has now been turned into a campaign that aims to gather a million signatories to show the world that the current laws in Iran are not compatible with their human dignity. The feminist movement has gone one step further and demands the correction of all unequal laws.

Iran's feminist movement believes that women's rights and democracy are of equal weight and that without gender equality there can be democracy in a

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Ahmad Zeydabadi

### **My Flexibility Side and My Rigid One**

Two of my friends who recently stepped out of the infamous ward 209 of Evin prison, brought me a message from their interrogators: We have created a sweet case against you and will soon deal with you. I am not sure whether this is just an intimidation technique or they really have a plan against me.

In any case, since my children smelled the rat, their hearts are filled with the bitter memories they have from the year 2000 and 2003. Parsai gets scared from those events. His mother remembers that when they came for me for the second time, he went to his friend Azin and whispered in his ear, "Today they handcuffed my dad, took him to prison." That night out of fear, he wet his bed eight times, his mother recalls. I realize that many will say that this type of writing plays into people's emotions. We must take responsibility for what we do.

But I ask what have we done for which we must accept a responsibility? We are people of the pen and speech, and do not need, desire, or perhaps have the ability for, anything else. Still, they kept us in prison under such sever conditions as if they had found a dangerous group of armed guerrillas with a cache of arms and ammunition.

I have repeatedly said in recent years that I have no conflict with this group of people. I am no longer interested in correcting their ways either. I have left the matter with God to decide on them according to His laws.

This is the reason why I have accepted social deprivation, and have not even publicly demanded what they took from me. Nor did I complain about the hundreds of hours that they made me spend to simply renew my passport.

The only thing that I do these days is to write for two blocked news websites. For one of them I try to present professional and independent analysis of current events, while for the other I occasionally express dissatisfaction and protests against violations of human rights of Iranians, or warn of the consequences of some of the current official policies.

But it appears that they cannot tolerate even this much.

They believe that since the US and Israel commit crimes to advance their interests, nobody should be sensitive about the violations of human rights of Iranians. They also think that because they are battling with the US, they must oppose everything that the US says or does, lest they be accused of being an accomplice with the enemy.

This logic is completely invalid. Violations that take place on this earth are no license for more violations by others. Furthermore, the world today is not painted black or white alone. So one cannot say that everything that a country does is absolutely destructive, or absolutely positive. The world is more complex than that and events can only be judged on their merit one at a time and in detail.

So if they desire that I remain quiet about human rights violations over Iranian citizens, or to succumb to their black-and-white vision of the world and international issues, they are wasting their time as it will never happen. Every human being has a set of beliefs without which he is not human. What I have learned from Imam Ali and Imam Hussein is to defend the dignity of the human being in your society first and then in other societies, and protest their violations whoever or whatever government may be responsible for them, even though they may have little impact.

I do not claim to have been fearless or fully active in the defense of the rights of others, but nevertheless I believe in a set of principles on which I shall not trample.

Furthermore, by acquiring political power these gentlemen have no right to impose their rigid and dogmatic interpretations of religion, history, philosophy, politics, economics and international relations on all Iranians and demand that people follow them. This is Iran and not North Korea. While it is true that despotism has been around us for a long time, but this has never been a totalitarian society, and it shall never be.

I remember when in the year 2000 after I asked my interrogator, "So what do you want from me after all this talk", he replied,

"We want you to repent." "So now I know, but this will never happen," I told him.

I asked him if he had read the book 'A Man for All Seasons'. He paused and then replied in the affirmative, but I construed his pause to be a "no", which he said so as not to appear to be weakness.

"If you have, then you can consider me to be like Thomas More. I am a mystic in my own way. In my social life I have a sphere where I am flexible but also a sphere where I am unvarying. Anyone who treats me through the first sphere will find me easy, flexible, with a sense of humor. But if anyone deals with me through the other sphere and destroy my humanity, then he will find me hard, serious, and inflexible. Even if I am taken to the guillotine like Thomas More I will not repent and you are free to try it," I said.

Hasan Zarezadeh Ardeshir

### **Mousavi Khoini Released**

Former reformist member of Majlis (Parliament), Ali Akbar Mousavi Khoini, was released by the Ministry of Intelligence after spending more than 130 days at Evin Prison's infamous Ward 209.

Khoini was released on a 1,500 million riyal (\$163,000) bail, according to his wife, Zohreh Islamian.

Hours after his release, Khoini said that his arrest was prompted by his "useful and effective activities as a member of the Sixth Majlis in pursuing prisoner's rights, tracking illegal detention centers, criticizing the performance of the authorities, membership in the Tahkim-e Vahdat organization [Office for Consolidating Unity], and in particular, criticizing the performance of the government in handling the nuclear dossier." Dismissing all charges against him, Khoini hoped to continue his "social, human rights and political activities on a peaceful and civil basis through the Tahkim-e Vahdat organization."

Hours prior to Khoini's release, Tabriz's MP, Akbar Alami, had asked the head of judiciary and the Minister of Justice to open up Evin's Ward 209 for public investigation. "Unfortunately," said Khoini, "despite repeated efforts and promises made by Ministry of Intelligence officials, we have not been able to make this visit yet."

Alami added, "No intelligent person can accept 4 months of temporary detention prior to any court trials, especially for something like participating in a mass gathering." Alami believes such actions violate the constitution, the Sharia (Islamic Law), and citizenship rights.

The Ministry of Intelligence operates a number of secret detention centers. One such center is the Towhid Prison, which was shut down after reports of torture surfaced following the arrest of student activists during the 1999 Student Uprising.

The Evin Prison's Ward 209, however, is designated especially for holding political and high-risk security prisoners. Those who end up at Ward 209 are never entered into the computer system and go through a completely separate processing center. No one outside of the Ministry of Intelligence has access to Ward 209 processing centers and facilities.

Ward 209 is a two-story building: the first floor contains offices while the second consists of 10 corridors, each of which house 9 solitary cells. The first corridor holds female and the rest hold male prisoners.

Like other illegal detention facilities, Ward 209 is not under the jurisdiction of the Prison's Association. During former President Khatami's tenure, Ward 209 opened up its doors to public investigators for a short time, and people like Mousavi Khoini were able to visit it. Now, however, the efforts of MP's such as Alami to visit the detention center have failed. Ahmad Batebi, Keyvan Ansari, Aboulfazel Jahandar, Kheirollah Derakhshandi, Kianush Sanjari, Ayatollah Boroujerdi, Keyvan Rafii and Saeed Masouri are among the political prisoners who are currently being held at Ward 209. The rights of all of these prisoners have been violated, according to their lawyers and family members. Evin's Ward 209 is always full of prisoners charged with crimes such as treason, espionage and undermining national security. Most of these prisoners are kept in solitary and undergo severe psychological and at times physical torture. Unfortunately, most of them lack not only legal rights, but also the most basic human rights.

