

Re: message from correspondant

From: **Noam Chomsky** (chomsky@MIT.EDU)

Sent: 18 September 2001 22:47:33

To: _rutherford

Have to be brief, I'm afraid. Am utterly inundated with requests for interviews and other inquiries.

To be honest, afraid I don't remember, but that's no surprise. Can barely remember yesterday. You cannot imagine the scale of correspondence; and the crush of everything else.

On Iran, I think the story is rather different, as I wrote at the time (Fateful Triangle, 1983), and subsequently as more information was released. Immediately after the fall of the Shah, Carter sent a NATO general to Iran to try to stimulate a military coup. When that failed, the US turned at once to standard operating procedure for overthrowing a civilian government: send arms to the military, establishing contacts with those who can carry out a coup. The procedure that had recently worked brilliantly in Indonesia and Chile, for example. US arms were sent at once via Israel (which had the best contacts with the Iranian military). There were no hostages. The first hostages (who happened to be Iranian) were taken several years later. Accordingly, it was not an arms for hostage deal. In fact, high Israeli officials explained exactly what it was, and quite publicly, until the State Department shut them up (including the Israeli ambassador). Standard operating procedure. By 1984, Iran identified and executed the military contacts, and the US project shifted into a new phase -- the Ollie North-Robert MacFarlane phase. By then there were hostages, so it could be masked in more humane terms: arms for hostages.

On the missile shield, I wrote a response to a number of journalists right away, posted on the web by quite a few people (not me) and since published widely abroad (though many journalists have seen it here, as I know from interviews). In it I mentioned that despite the absurdity, these events would be used to escalate the "missile defense" program, for the simple reason that it has little if anything to do with "missile defense." It has openly been described for years by the US Space Command as program for militarization of space, crucially including offensive weapons. They compare it to development of Navies in earlier years. The term "defense" is standardly used to mask offensive programs. And within a few days that happened, as the IHT reported. Congress voted the funds it had been withholding -- knowing, at least those with any brains, that it had nothing to do with defense.

I can understand your "nagging doubt," but I don't believe it. Seems to me there are simpler explanations. On the coverage of the Palestinian reaction, you're exactly right. It was criminal propaganda, designed to intensify the suffering of people the US has been crushing under its boot for a long time.

Noam

At 10:18 AM 9/18/2001 -0400, you wrote:

>Dear Professor Chomsky,

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>You may not remember having exchanged a few letters with me a number of
>years ago when I lived in Toronto. We moved to Nice four years ago and I now
>teach courses in Civilisation and Communication at an American-accredited
>post-secondaty school in Sophia Antipolis. My niece, Delphine Nain (2001),
>had you sign a book for me last year at a breakfast seminar with MIT
>students.

>

>Although I have no intention of sharing this idea with my students, since
>reading the news after the attacks on New York and Washington, a depressing
>and unpleasant thought has lodged in my mind like a splinter.

>
>It began with a report in the IHT (A Test Few Presidents Have Known,
>09/13/01) which reminded readers that, when faced with the "Iran Hostage
>Drama" crisis, the Carter Administration failed to secure the release of the
>hostages in Iran -- and that this contributed to the subsequent election of
>Ronald Reagan. In another, we were told that, credible opposition to a wide
>range of important initiatives -- from the missile shield programme to
>Manufacturing Consent to the crusade for globalisation -- will be
>neutralised by linking it in the public/media mind with this horrific
>tragedy.

>
>I was not surprised that the tale of the Carter Administration neglected to
>include what many consider to be the most important detail of the story: the
>details which, when uncovered, became known as the Arms for Hostages Affair.
>That a recent (and closely linked to the current) administration
>demonstrated a readiness to put its citizens at risk for realpolitik
>objectives was politely ignored. And then I remembered Oliver North and his
>friends -- and their covert operations carried out from within the White
>House regardless of (or even contrary to) political (and therefore
>theoretically 'public') consent.

>
>In another ("Air Terrorism said to Help Argument for Missile Shield",
>15-16/09/01), we are told that "The suicide attacks on the World Trade
>Center and the Pentagon appear to have strengthened, not weakened, the
>prospects for congressional support of President George W. Bush's missile
>defence plan." And that, "...even though the attacks showed that the biggest
>threat to the nation was from terrorism, as opposed to a missile attack by a
>rogue state, congressional reluctance to oppose the president at this time
>seemed likely to overwhelm that consideration." On anything?

>
>As troubling as its implications may be, I cannot dislodge a nagging doubt.
>Is it even conceivable that:

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>i) some small group within (say,) the National Security Council who are
>convinced of the urgent need to build Bush's missile shield,
>ii) learned of a plan by, say, bin Laden's organisation to commit an
>outrageous act of terrorism on a major American city
>iii) on their own initiative, decided to accept a certain degree of
>"collateral damage", to let the citizens "take one for the team" --as the
>only way to ensure sufficient public support for a plan (they believe) is
>ultimately destined to save millions?

>
>Although just a footnote to the events of the past few days (which is itself
>part of the whole problem), I was disappointed to see how the TV news groups
>jumped so easily onto an unfortunate piece of video footage in which less
>than two dozen Palestinians were shown celebrating news of the attack (the
>group became "hundreds" in subsequent text reports). Although information
>soon emerged that the videotape had misrepresented the scene, instead of
>correcting the false impression made by the footage, a follow-up article
>emphasised 'the Image Problem' caused by the report -- but left intact the
>most pernicious impressions left by the footage.

>
>Rutherford -- 16 September, 2001

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