



activism

Noam Chomsky on US-Presence in Europe and the case of Edward Snowden

NOTE: This transcript may not be 100% accurate.

Zain Raza:

According to a report by the department of defense, dated June 2015, there are 44,660 US troops stationed in Germany. It is estimated that there's circa – and reports vary, but let me just point this out – 170 military installations, the most vital being Ramstein, where drone operations as you know are conducted from. What do you think is the view of the US political and military establishment towards Germany today? Is there any significant change since what you've described before?

Noam Chomsky:

If you go back to the early 50s, there was always concern that Europe might move in a direction independent of US power. It might become what was called at the time a “*third force*” in international affairs. The dominant force was the United States, the second force was the junior super power Russia- Soviet Union, and there was concern that Europe was, of course, a rich, developed, advanced area that might just move in an independent direction. There were various proposals for this like De Gaulle advocated what he called a Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals, including the major developed parts of Russia. Willy Brand's Ostpolitik was another move in that direction. And the US was always concerned with [this]. In fact, one of the functions of NATO, as is generally understood, was to ensure that Europe would remain under the US aegis, but not move towards an independent direction.

Now those concerns still exist, and in some ways are even greater. Europe does have the capacity, under German initiative, to move in an independent direction. There's some steps in that direction, it's very current in fact. Take, say, the Iran nuclear deal that was just made. The European powers, Germany, France, are very enthusiastic about it. They're moving directly to try to reestablish commercial and other relations with Iran. European ministers of the government, corporation executives are flocking to Tehran to try to set up deals and arrangements.

It's not happening from the United States, on the contrary. It's even possible that the US might undermine the agreement, not the executive, but congress might find ways to undermine the agreement. In fact, if you take a look at the Republican primaries taking place right now: just about every leading candidate has said that when he's elected he's going to cancel

the agreement. In fact, several of them said, “when we are elected, we are going to bomb Iran”. That’s quite different from the European attitude.

And it’s one of a number of ways, quite a few, in which Europe and the dominant elements in the United States have followed different paths. This kind of conflict has existed for a long time, as I say, it goes back to the early 50s, and it takes different forms at different times.

With US power declining in the world, relatively to others, it’s still overwhelmingly dominant, but it is declining. The options for Europe increase to might move in that direction. Now, of course, Europe means primarily Germany.

Zain Raza:

I want to talk about some single examples and [work towards] to the greater mechanisms that are at work here. So, Germany recently dropped a case that was investigating abuses of the NSA, which was revealed by Edward Snowden’s whistleblowing actions. Details included such as eavesdropping on our chancellor’s cell phone, even collecting metadata of 20 to 30 million German citizens on a regular basis and this investigation was dropped. And if you look back a decade, El Masri, a German national, was detained in a holiday in Macedonia by the CIA and extradited to Egypt where he was tortured extensively and it was later determined that he’s innocent. Now in both cases, our prosecution went after it, but at the federal level it [the case] was dropped at some point. And we’ve come to know that US is at play here. So what mechanisms are at play here, that always align German policy to US interest?

Noam Chomsky:

Germany and France and other European countries – their governments – have made the decision to subordinate themselves to US power. Shows up in these ways and many others. You recall when the president of Bolivia, Evo Morales, happened to fly to Moscow, and was flying back to Bolivia on a plane that had diplomatic immunity, of course, the European countries, including Germany and France, just wouldn’t let him go through their airspace, obviously on US orders. US thought that maybe Snowden was on board, so they wouldn’t let him enter the airspace, the plane finally had to land in Austria where it was invaded by Austrian police at violation of every imaginable diplomatic conventions, to find out if Snowden was on it. All of this is kind of pitiful. It’s a revelation of real cowardice in the face of power that the European elites are unwilling to confront, a sign of subordination and real lack of dignity and integrity, in my view. And the cases you mentioned are examples.

There are, I think, by now four Latin American countries that offer Asylum to Snowden, not one European country – in fact they won’t even let him cross their borders. Why? Because the master in Washington tells them “we don’t want him to”. And Snowden, it’s important to recall, performed an enormous service, a patriotic service in fact, to the people of the United States and the world. He revealed to the population, what your government is doing to you. That’s just what he should have done. That’s the responsibility of a decent citizen. The idea that you should be punished for this is really grotesque, and that Europe participates in it is even worse. Same is true for Assange.