



## Noam Chomsky on the Dangers for Humanity

*Note: The following transcript may not be 100% correct.*

**Zain Raza (Senior Editor acTVism Munich): To my last question: could you list some dangers that humanity is facing or is going to face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? And what mechanisms are available to the public in order to avoid these catastrophes?**

Prof. Noam Chomsky: There are two overwhelming dangers, huge shadows looming over everything. Now the first of them is environmental catastrophe. Which is coming. We can debate how long it'll be, but it's coming. And it could be very severe. Now, there are things that can be done about it, and [in] some places some things are being done, like, say, Denmark is moving towards some kind of sustainable energy. Germany has plans to move towards a larger degree of sustainable energy. But for the most part we're just racing towards the cliff that we're going to fall over. It's almost certain that most of the fossil fuels must be left in the ground if we hope to have a decent survival. On the contrary, the energy corporations are trying to exploit every last opportunity to get a drop of oil or gas out of the ground, and their not being stopped. Part of the logic of a capitalist market is that you maximize short-term profit and you don't pay attention to what the consequences are for others or for the future. So that's a huge problem. And things can be done about it, but they're not being done, except in limited ways. That will be real catastrophe for our – not very far off – future generations.

The other major shadow is nuclear war, that should not be underestimated. We've come very close to nuclear war repeatedly. Now, nuclear war is essentially a terminal disaster. Some things survive, but not much. And we've come close, there are serious dangers right now. In theory we know how to eliminate them, but we're not doing it. In fact the nuclear programs are being expanded. The US program is being expanded by about a trillion dollars over the coming decades. There's serious crises in Ukraine, in the Middle East, elsewhere that could break into nuclear war. Now these are major problems.

In the background there's another problem. It's not a problem of survival, but it's a problem of minimal decency, and that is the neo-liberal assault against the global population that's been going on now for generations. It's having different effects in different places, almost always negative. Now a few places have been able to begin to extricate themselves from it. One of

the most important is South America. For the first time in 500 years South America has begun to extricate itself from western imperial control – [in the] last century that meant US control – to unify, to develop internal organizations that exclude western domination, to face some of its tremendous internal problems. The US has been almost driven out of most of the hemisphere, which is a remarkable change in world affairs. Partly they're reacting to the neo-liberal assault, which was quite devastating in South America. They actually followed the rules and suffered.

In Europe the austerity programs are extremely destructive, destructive of life, of survival, of democracy, and there are some attempts in the peripheral countries mainly to try to respond to them. In the United States the neo-liberal assault has had the effect of virtually undermining democracy. It barely functions. Take a look at the last election, November 2014. The statistics have just come out on actual voting. They've been studied by some leading political scientists: Walter Dean Burnham and Thomas Ferguson. What they point out is that voting participation in the last election was actually for the most part back to the level of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. That's a time when voting was restricted to property to white males. Voting participation is back to that level in much of the country. That's a sign that people have simply abandoned any hope in the democratic system. With some reason, because careful studies show what we basically all know, that the opinions and attitudes of the large majority have no effect whatsoever on policy. Now policy's determined by an extremely narrow sector of concentrated wealth. That's plutocracy, it's not democracy.

Take a look at the economic situation: since the neo-liberal assault began, mainly under Reagan – well, before, but escalating under Reagan – for most of the population it's been a period of stagnation or decline. The real wages for male workers are back to the level of the 1960s. Now there's been productivity growth and wealth increase, but it's going to a tiny percentage of the population, a fraction of one percent. And for most of the population it's stagnation, sometimes decline.

Those are serious problems. They can be dealt with, those are not at the level of the first two I've mentioned, but they're serious. And they're affecting people's lives seriously. Now, there are plenty of other problems to deal with, particularly terrorism. There is a global terrorism campaign, far beyond any other. It's Obama's drone campaign. That's a terrorist campaign of a scale that has never existed in the past. This campaign is formally, officially, explicitly aimed at people who the government suspects might some day want to harm us. Might some day want to harm us. They have to be killed, along with anybody else that's standing around. I mean, if Al Qaida or anyone came out with a campaign like that we would be beyond scandalized, we'd probably nuke them. But that's official policy supported by the western countries. Now that's a serious problem. Global terrorism is a serious problem. This is right at the top. We could go on and think of plenty of others.