

Bombing of Afghanistan: Reaction

NOAM CHOMSKY

So far, the US-UK response is about what had been expected. What has been reported is attacks by cruise missiles and high-altitude bombers, accompanied by some food drops outside of Taliban-controlled areas (most of the country), such a transparent PR gesture that there is no attempt even to conceal it. The attacks appear to have been based entirely outside the Muslim world, presumably because of fear of protests. It is far too early, and we have much too little information, to say anything with confidence, but it is not unlikely that the mood is captured by story from Cairo in the *Boston Globe* with the headline "Protests, horror greet US assault," quoting an Egyptian waiter as saying "I give you food and I kill you? It makes me crazy to think about that."

I was rather surprised to see how thin the evidence was that the US presented, transmitted via Tony Blair. After what must be the most intensive international investigative effort in history, they were able to find very little—much less than I speculated on my own, without resources—to link bin Laden to the Sept. 11 crimes. That tends to support the conclusion of many specialists that the perpetrators come from decentralized networks, probably with limited communication, and very hard to penetrate. Charges against the Taliban were virtually non-existent; if harboring suspected terrorists is a crime that merits bombing, then much of the world, including the US, should be instantly attacked. That should be too obvious even for comment. And we do not know whether Taliban offers of negotiation and transfer of bin Laden were serious because the West simply dismissed

them, preferring to bomb—a traditional stance, though it is obscured in the rewriting of history. The systematic falsification of the past is deplorable in itself, but has serious human consequences, as we see once again. There still remain the lawful means that have been pursued by other states, which have been subjected to far more destructive terrorist attacks even than those of Sept. 11. It is rather striking that these are not even under consideration, and I have not even seen any mention, in the mainstream, of precedents that are appropriate and entirely uncontroversial, because of the judgment of the International Court of Justice and the Security Council Resolution (which the US vetoed), all apparently unknown; a success of historical revisionism that would have left Orwell open-mouthed in astonishment, and an ideological achievement of no slight significance, as we see in today's headlines.

It is impossible to estimate how many miserable and innocent Afghans have already died as an immediate consequence of the threat of bombing and the closing of the Pakistan border that the US demanded at once (if we can believe the *NY Times*), and the failure to provide food, as could have been done from the first day, not only by air drops nothing has hindered that—but also by truck convoy, as the international relief efforts demonstrated when they began. I dearly wish there had been some surprises, some deviation from traditional patterns of behavior. Unless that happens, the immediate future looks very grim for the people of Afghanistan, and the cycle of violence may be escalated in a familiar manner, with consequences that are not pleasant to contemplate.

Confronting arsenicosis with new technology

NAIMUL HAQ

back from 24-Parganas, West Bengal

NONI Gopal and his seven-member family were virtually on deathbed being victims of 'an unknown disease' that broke out in their neighbourhood. Each member of the family from his youngest son to mother-in-law were gradually confined to bed struck by the severe illness. One by one they became weaker and continued to lose weight.

"We had black spots all over our body which appeared over several years. Headaches, skin irritation, and body pains were everyday complaints at one time. As time passed we lost our appetite for any kind of food and became unable to stoop down. We all experienced chronic vomiting," said Dipali Das, Gopal's wife.

Dipali, of Adahata village North 24-Paragnas district continued the traditional village healers were caught by surprise when they examined the spots. In the meantime, we spent thousands of rupees mostly in borrowed money to get rid of the pains but the strange disease was still with us. Exhausted with all efforts in the village we then went to downtown Kolkata, where doctors for the first time identified the disease as terminal arsenic poisoning. Doctors from a West Bengal State hospital examined hair, nail and urine samples from each sick person in the family. They found unusually high levels of arsenic in their bodies. Simultaneously, the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) tested water samples from the tubewell they were using for less than six months. Laboratory findings showed exceptionally high level of arsenic, at least 70 times the acceptable one in the tubewell water. The PHED instantly sealed the tubewell.

Groundwater arsenic contamination has put millions of lives at risk in both Bangladesh and the neighbouring Indian state of West Bengal. Millions of people are still drinking water from thousands of tubewells, most of which contain arsenic at dangerously high levels. Extensive laboratory tests by UNICEF in collaboration with respective government agencies, the World Health Organisation and concerned universities have revealed presence of arsenic 10 to 70 times the acceptable level of 0.05 milligram per litre in many places of both countries. This environmental crisis has been described as the 'largest mass poisoning' in the history of mankind.

In Bangladesh alone, 59 districts of the 64 are now more or less affected by the crisis, forcing the government to seal off thousands of hand pumped wells. In West Bengal, though the problem in terms of population affected is stated to be much smaller than in Bangladesh, the gravity remains equal in both the countries.

According to available data, more than 50,000 hand pumped wells, some of which were installed ten to twenty years ago, provide arsenic contaminated water with levels far exceeding the recommended 50 ppb. Currently more than 200,000 people in India suffer from some degree of arsenic poisoning or arsenicosis with the majority of the symptoms appearing within the last ten years in West Bengal. As part of the mitigation challenge, the West Bengal government has recently approved three chemical based water filtration systems for providing safe drinking water. The three technologies are now being

tested on a pilot basis and one of them has already proven very effective.

This correspondent visited several sites in West Bengal where, as the experts say, "the most environmentally and user friendly treatment system" is now being demonstrated at the community level. In Adahata and Maricha, two of the most severely affected areas near Kolkata, the PHED using funds from UNICEF has installed an integrated water treatment system (at least 150 units are on trial) developed by an American company called Aprylon Technologies, Inc. Unlike most other available technologies, Aprylon's system is also designed for distribution of 'purified' water, removing bacteria and other germs that can affect the community. So it has an added advantage besides being low cost and user friendly.

no adverse health effects. Furthermore, spent Aqua-Bind media has been tested on many occasions for leachable arsenic using US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) protocols for toxicity characteristics. All testing performed to date has demonstrated the spent media to be non-hazardous waste, its engineers claimed.

The authority approving the technology for piloting in West Bengal also defended claims of the Aprylon engineers.

"We are satisfied as far as safety of the product and the spent media is concerned. And most important of all, since the technology is community based it is one that we think should be promoted for immediate solutions," said an engineer of Public Health Engineering Department, West Bengal. One of the special features of this ATU is its accelerated capacity to

West Bengal is a testimony to it. "My family and I have been drinking water from this unit ever since it was installed about three years ago and there is no more complaints. Look, the spots are gone and we no longer suffer from weakness," said Dipali Das. "I believe the filter has saved our lives. In fact, we did not take much medicines," she added.

Forty-one-year old Babul Das and his six-member family in Adahata, suffered similar agony. He said "I knew I was dying and only God knows how I survived. My son and daughter were in no less pain than I suffered."

Babul and his family have been drinking from the same filter used by the Nonis. At least fifteen more families share the filter for everyday drinking and cooking and the demand for installing more such filters is increasing. In Maricha, about fifteen-km from Adahata, people using Aprylon's system for the last one year said they were happy with the taste and there is no foul odour.

In Malda and Murshidabad, two of the West Bengal districts also badly affected by groundwater arsenic contamination have demonstration ATUs as well. The government and UNICEF encouraged by the ATU's performance has "ordered" installation of more such community based systems.

At least 7000 ATUs are in the pipeline for future implementation by the Government of India. However, at least 250 ATUs have been placed on order for immediate use in the most badly affected areas.

Experts in Bangladesh having partially reviewed Aprylon Technologies also on trial in five places, when contacted said they were so far happy with the acceptability of the filter and its user friendliness.

"A committee of experts would soon look into the technical aspects of the system but what I like about the Aprylon ATU is it serves a large community instead of serving the individual families like most of the approved technologies here," said an anonymous source.

Aprylon's Aqua-Bind media and ATU were recently recognized in the US for its innovative design and outstanding performance, winning both the R&D Magazine's 'R&D 100 Award' and the Water Environment Federation's (WEF) "Innovation of the Year Award".

Naimul Haq is Staff Reporter of The Daily Star.



Aprylon system serves Adahata and Maricha villagers in 24-Parganas with safe arsenic-free water.

The medium used in Aprylon technology is "bacteria static" and thus prevents growth of microorganisms inside the filter. Further, this does not give any unpleasant odour or taste, improving the overall aesthetic quality of water. The villagers welcomed the unit, which is just fitted to a hand-pumped tubewell.

Aprylon's Project Manager, Kiron Senapati, supervising its operations in West Bengal while showing this correspondent how the unit works said, "Aprylon's Arsenic Treatment Units (ATUs) in West Bengal have a flow-rate of 8-10 litres of water per minute for arsenic concentrations as high as 3500 parts per billion (ppb)."

Senapati claimed, "the average water production per media charge is about 200,000 litres, which will last six months treating an influent level of arsenic up to 1200 ppb." Aprylon has successfully demonstrated its integrated treatment system in India and Bangladesh, and through field experience, has further improved the performance of the arsenic treatment units, creating a simplified design to provide a system that is easy to operate and requires minimal maintenance," its engineers said.

The developers of the technology guarantee the media is safe to handle and has been found to have

What to do with Osama: 'Take him to court'

While most Americans are reported to favour a US attack in retaliation for the 11 September terrorist strikes against their country, many other Americans are taking to the streets to plead for peace. But their voices have been ignored by much of the media. Gemini News Service spoke to one peace-loving American, linguist and political commentator Noam Chomsky.

ALEX WHITING and ROBERT E SULLIVAN from London/New York

OSAMA bin Laden, named as the man behind the 11 September terror attacks on the United States, should be treated as a criminal and tried before the International Court of Justice, says Noam Chomsky, a hero of the American left.

"What happened was a terrible crime" and should be treated as such, he told Gemini News Service in an interview. The perpetrators should be found, brought to court, and the issues behind the terrorist strikes should be heard.

"There is a reason why it is not called a crime, which it is, but a war, which it isn't," he explains.

"Crime is specific, and if it is a crime you have to present evidence. It's very likely that the evidence the United States has is not credible."

Ever since the terrorist attack, Chomsky and a growing number of American intellectuals have been making public statements calling for restraint. They are not alone.

Although some 82 per cent of Americans in a CNN poll favoured a US attack and 90 per cent approved of President George W Bush's handling of crises thousands have taken to the streets to protest retaliatory strikes on Afghanistan, accused of harbouring bin Laden.

Demonstrations have broken out and vigils have been held on more than 150 university campuses across the country. Almost 1,000 people blocked traffic in Times Square with anti-bombing signs; and a coalition of dozens of peace, poverty, human rights, and religious organisations called for a national protest.

In New York's Union Square, which has turned into an impromptu shrine for the dead, many messages have been attached by friends and relatives of the dead which call for peace.

Hundreds gathered on 42nd Street to form an anti-war coalition men and women who are united in their protest against any policy that mean the deaths of more innocents overseas.

An impromptu group of 1,500 clerics wrote off a letter to Bush saying that while they generally supported a fight against terrorism, "We must not, out of anger and vengeance, indiscriminately retaliate in ways that bring on even more loss of innocent life."

Across the world, there have been demonstrations for peace, which have gone largely unreported in the media. In Britain, the US's main ally in the global anti-terrorist coalition, 3,000 people took to the streets in London alone.

Chomsky, 73, a linguist and a frequent commentator on US foreign policy called the 11 September attacks "horrendous" but added; "Bin Laden is doubtless praying for a US attack on Afghanistan. It will mobilise people to his horrendous cause."

"If you bomb you are falling into the diabolical trap laid by Bin Laden. There is a well known alternative: follow the principals of domestic and international law."

Chomsky pointed to an earlier case of terrorism which was taken to court by the country that had been attacked.

"The International Court of Justice condemned the regime for unlawful use of force (which is terrorism), ordering it to desist pay

reparations." That regime was the US in its war against Nicaragua the 1980s

Nicaragua took its grievances about America's military and paramilitary activities in and against the left-wing Sandinista government to the International Court of Justice in April 1984.

The court ruled in June 1986 that the US had acted against Nicaragua "in breach of its obligation under customary international law not to intervene in the affairs of another State..." in several ways, including mining Nicaraguan ports and training, arming and financing the anti-government contra forces.

In a later ruling the Court decided on the amount of compensation the US should pay Nicaragua.

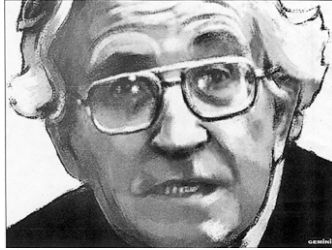
When the US ignored the ruling, Nicaragua took its case to the United Nations General Assembly, which affirmed the Court's decision but does not have the mechanisms to enforce its own declaration.

When the federal building in Oklahoma was blown up in April 1995, the US government had a choice, says Chomsky: they could bomb Texas, Idaho and Montana where the white supremacist groups connected with the bombing have their bases, or they could treat it as a crime.

"They found the perpetrators and to some extent tried to pay attention to the issues behind it [the bombing]."

According to Chomsky, coverage of dissenting voice by the US press has been minimal and not for the first time.

"Take the 1980s there was enormous opposition to the US war in Central America, and it was the



US commentator Noam Chomsky: try law not war

leading issue in the US press. I went through every editorial and opinion piece in the New York Times and Washington Post during peak periods of coverage. They were split. About half were in favour and half were opposed to the war because they felt it wasn't working and [the US] should find other means of restoring Nicaragua to the general American mood."

Many disagreed with Bush's statement to Congress that America was a target of terrorist attack because, as Bush said, "they hate our freedoms, our freedom of religion, and our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other."

Peter Marcuse, an urban planning professor at Columbia University, blames "US arrogance in international relations, most recently unilateralist in dealing with multilateral treaties, with global inequality in which US wealth contrasts with deep poverty elsewhere, with the US flexing its military muscles as the sole super power."

Chomsky agrees, saying: "Even Saudi bankers and businessmen, all pro-American, interviewed recently, say what everyone knows people in the area are strongly opposed to US policies in region."

"The great majority of pressed people [in the Middle East] are bitter bitter that their great wealth is going to the West, not to the people in the slums of Cairo and refugee camps. They trace a lot back to the US."

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America's choice

SYED MAQSUD JAMIL

THE twin tower carnage needs a dispassionate analysis. It was carried out to strike terror. The desperate act did not have least human consideration. Innocent lives were lost to fury of a Kamikaze mission. The perpetrators were driven by vengeance or satanic design. It is for America to decide whether it will allow terror to grip it, or permanently defeat the ill-conceived design of the terrorists with sensible decisions. America's time of reckoning has come. The decisions are there in the words of Billy Graham that "under the debris there is a foundation", and that of its President George W. Bush when he said, "adversity introduces us to ourselves".

There are two specific options before America, one, it can act like any other lesser country of the world; two, it can act like the leader of the world. A lesser country does not have to think of its responsibilities to the world; it can act like a loose cannon. A leader acts to uphold and preserve for greater good.

It has far greater importance when globalization is turning the world into an integrated entity. Bin Laden and Middle Eastern terrorist organizations can rightly be at the top of prime suspects. It is the most facile thing for America to do. However, the facts, if they elude America, may create '500 Bin Ladens'. Investigations in order to follow an orderly course and to remain well focused look for evidence around the site of the crime. Although it appears that America has collected strong evidence against Bin Laden's connection, still it is a good thing if it has already looked for its Timothy McVeigh and David Koresh. Lest one of their kinds gets away, the pestilence may visit her again. For madness is capable of most weird monstrosities.

America prides itself on being a melting pot of nationalities. People throughout the world look to America as the land of opportunity where enterprise and creativity are rewarded. The campaign against Bin Laden is degenerating into a

perception that looks on Arabs and Muslims with hostility. American leadership should strive to change this perception. Otherwise, this will alienate the people of Arab and Muslim world, a major trading partner of America. Such outcome will act against the economic integration of the world.

soldier could return to safety. During 1988 pullback, the Russians were preyed on with great vengeance. Yegor Lukanchuk, a 19-year-old Soviet private commenting on Afghanistan said then, "I would like to go back to visit someday, but not as a soldier".

Most military analysts do not see

Twin Tower carnage is the foundation from which America can embark on a course of building a righteous and reconciled world. The world has faith in America's capabilities, for it is endowed with rich heritage built on justice, freedom, and peace.

Taliban's Afghanistan is facing the military might of the most formidable power of the world and a grand alliance of willing partners. The quarry Osama is still free and everybody's mystery. Devastated Afghanistan will turn into a wasteland, in case the American attack accelerates to the ferocity of Gulf War. In fact, there is hardly any important military installation in that country after twenty years of unrelenting warfare. Osama has no need of 'Fuehrer's Bunker', because the terrain offers a maze of caves and tunnels. Taliban are a mobile force of rugged warriors. The skirmishes and confrontations will keep changing places.

America is up against a force of its own creation. It is reported to have spent 3.7 billion dollar every year after the Mujahedeens. The warring forces will fight, win, loose, and die. There is more to the wages of the war than that. Thousands of Afghans will wander around and try to trek to safer places. It is ironic that America, who has tried its best to help the ordinary Afghans, is pushing them to newer and greater misery. There are two million of them living in the abject conditions of camps around Peshawar. All neighbours have closed their borders. Besides, the many ethnic groups of Afghanistan do not have great love for each other. They are given to looting and plundering, particularly those who are on the run. In 1842, only one English

any military gain in Afghanistan. The common Afghan will suffer more. It is going to be a human catastrophe. America here has a responsibility, if it cares about the human quality of its world leadership. A lesser nation would naturally walk away. Afghanistan offers America a great opportunity of winning over a country by helping to rebuild it. Pakistan can be a useful partner in this rebuilding. Pushtun majority shares close ethnic, cultural and geographical ties with Pakistan. The Uzbeks in the north, the Tajiks in the north-east and the Shiites on the western border have never been great upholders of central authority in Afghanistan. They would rather work to divide Afghanistan into a cluster of ethnic enclaves.

An enlightened and strong Pushtun leadership is the answer to the end of Afghan woes. Sadly, the Taliban are incapable of this leadership. They have cloaked their half-taught minds with religious fervour of foot soldiers. There is a stark difference between the Islamic leaders of Taliban and those of Iran. Khomeini and his successors are highly enlightened clerics, while Mullah Omar is neither a cleric nor enlightened. America could do well to put Pakistan to work in crafting an enlightened Pushtun leadership in Afghanistan. It will however be wise to stay clear of the 'Mujahedeens' of the past. The Uzbek warlords of the kind of Dostam and secessionist Tadjik leaders should and peace.

