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**Transcript of Seminar with Emanuel Pastreich and Professor Noam Chomsky
Held as a Cooperative Initiative between the The Asia Institute and the Global
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Emanuel Pastreich:

Recently we have seen quite a bit reporting about a reengagement of the Obama Administration in East Asia and actions that are perceived as an effort to encircle and contain China. Most notable is the agreement to deploy 2,500 US Marines in Darwin announced during President Obama's November visit to Australia. Well certainly reading through the New York Times you might think that the United States has surrounded China. But there is plenty of evidence that it is in fact the United States that is increasingly isolated from the world. We find increasingly that it is the United States that is difficult to get visas for entry and the United States that is isolated in the international community.

If anything, excessive spending on outdated weapons systems from an age before climate change was the primary threat seem to be weakening the United States, and perhaps even increasing its overall dependency on China economically and technologically. So although we should never rule out the potential for conflict, there is reason to suspect that things are not exactly what they seem to be.

Noam Chomsky:

Well it's claimed that the USA and China are engaged in a power struggle. There's a small element of truth to that claim, but not much in my opinion. Notice that the power struggle such as it is, is off the coast of China, it's not in the Caribbean, it's not off the coast of the USA. If there is a conflict, it is a highly unequal one. I think the countries of Asia have good reason to be concerned about the China's potential ambitions and potential actions but at the moment, China remains, despite spectacular growth in the past several decades, a very poor country, facing internal problems completely unknown to the West.

China's growth, which is spectacular, nevertheless is highly dependent. China is in an assembly, plant, mainly an assembly plant for a high technology parts and components, advanced software and so on, which are developed in the surrounding industrial countries. So there's a lot of talk about US trade deficit with China, but the economists know well that the trade deficit is seriously overestimated. If you estimate the trade deficit in terms of value added, what's actually contributed, it turns

out that the deficit with China is overestimated by about 25%, and the deficit with South Korea, Taiwan, Japan and Singapore is about underestimated by the same amount. Because there is an Asian production system wherein high technology and R&D is located on the periphery of China, and China serves an assembly plant.

Emanuel Pastreich:

If anything, we can see remarkable economic integration between China and the United States. Although there are considerable restrictions for the movement of people from one country to the other, we find that products, raw materials, are moved from one country to the other with remarkable speed and efficiency. There are no barriers at all for raw materials to move from the United States to China or finished products to move from China to the United States. The level of economic integration between the two countries is perhaps unprecedented. No two economic systems have been so closely linked at such a distance. But the gap between people remains significant. Moreover, in terms of technology, we are finding extremes of outsourcing made possible by the decreasing significance of distance. The decreasing cost of transmitting information means that an American company can essentially be perfectly linked to Chinese factory and work as an integrated whole. But the countries themselves are not at all integrated. They barely know each other. Technology will continue improve in China, with serious implications for the world.

Noam Chomsky:

China will no doubt move up the technological ladder, but that's not an easy path, and it faces extremely serious problems- demographic problems, ecological problems, problems of repression, political problems unknown in the West. The military budget in China is a fraction of that of the United States'. In fact, it's a fraction of what the United States spends in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, let alone the whole budget. In fact, the US military budget is approximately the same as the rest of the world's combined.

So yes there's a conflict of interest in the South China Sea for example, but to think of it as some kind of parody is I believe highly misleading. That's not to say one should not be concerned about potential developments in China, there are plenty of points of conflict in the territorial water surrounding it, but we should recognize that it's by no means a parallel system, as you can see simply from the fact that the conflicts are off the coast of China. The United States with South Korea is as I mentioned planning a major military base in Jeju Island, confronting China, about 300 miles away, the US has just announced that it is deploying marines in Australia, confronting China, that's in addition to the many military bases it has there already.

It's inconceivable that China would be doing anything similar off the coasts of the United States. And it's worth keeping that in mind.

Emanuel Pastreich:

China has quite a bit invested in the United States and oddly Chinese have a more positive impression of Americans than do many foreigners. The confrontation is driven in part by conflicts in national interests, but the two countries are so integrated that such lines are not very clear. In fact the more critical question going forward will be the fragmentation within Chinese, and above all within American society. Those fault lines in the domestic social economic sphere are of course related to globalization and they are far more significant as a trend.

Noam Chomsky:

One of the very striking developments in the past several months, is the Occupy Movement: Occupy Wall Street, Occupy Boston, where I am, all over the US, same in Spain, same in Greece, same in England. These are mostly young people, when they occupy a particular area, say the park near Wall Street, they're forming associations, bonds, creating communities, exchanging ideas, discussing, proposing plans, reaching out to others, who form what they call the 99%. That's an accurate description, the overwhelming majority of the population, who have been left out of recent so called Neo-liberal economic development, have been left to stagnate while the tiny fraction of the population has become extremely wealthy and the democratic systems have been significantly eroded and now they are confronting that- first major effort in 30 years, to confront these developments. Well that's the kind of thing the youth can do and are doing, just as in Jeju Island, villagers are doing things. There's no shortage of opportunities, if there's a shortage of anything it's will, will and dedication.

Emanuel Pastreich:

We have a group of students with us here today who have actually made up their minds that they want to contribute to society, to break out of a consumer-dominated culture and have a real impact. When I speak to young people, they often express their frustration that there are these educated and capable people in positions of power, but they are doing nothing to address the issues of our age. Why is it, our youth ask, that these people so well educated and so well connected are just sitting their watching?

Noam Chomsky:

Well, that's not true that they're doing nothing. They're doing very definite things. So for example, the government of South Korea and United States, right now are planning to destroy a substantial part of the Island of Peace, to develop a naval base, which could be a stepping stone towards a nuclear war. That's doing something.

In social and economic policies of the past 30 years, the leaders of much of the world, the Western world, have been pursuing policies that have led to an extremely sharp concentration of wealth, unprecedented in the US, it's not the only case of such a trend. In the United States about 1/10 of the population has maybe 40% of wealth. For the rest of the population, over the last 30 years it has been stagnation and decline. They are doing things. Take the case of Brazil and South Korea that I've mentioned. The big growth period of South Korea has been since 1980, a very substantial period of economic growth. In Brazil, to repeat, in 1980, the economy of South Korea was about 2/3rds of Brazil's per capita. Brazil stagnated for about 20 years. South Korea grew enormously, and now Brazil is starting to grow, and South Korea is growing even faster. That's why South Korea economy is now roughly 3 times Brazil.

Now what happened during those 20 years? Well, those 20 years, Brazil was following policies of people in power who were doing something – mainly imposing so-called Neo-liberal principles and structural adjustment principles and others, which for all of Latin America, not just Brazil, led to a period of stagnation and decline, very much the way they have for the majority of the population in the US, England, and to certain extent, elsewhere, during the same period. So yes, they are doing something. People in power quite typically, do things to extend and intensify their own power. Sure that's what you expect them to do.

The young people are in a position where they don't have to do this. Young people are in the freest moment of their lives. People like you, youth, you're out of parental control more or less, you do not yet have the burdens of trying to put food on the table for family, maybe under difficult conditions. You're fairly free, more free than anyone ever is in their lives, to think, to plan, to consider alternatives, to develop new ideas, and so on, and that's why over the years, a great deal of initiative towards progress has indeed come from young people.

Emanuel Pastreich:

Korea is an interesting case. When I first came to Korea in 1994, the campuses smelled constantly of tear gas and there were violent protests on a regular basis. That age was after the big student movements of the 1980s that forced real

democratic change within the system. But now the situation is almost reversed. In the United States now we see student activism, but in Korea less so. Many more students are focused on preparing their credentials to get a job. They do not seem to have that same drive, whereas in the United States students are becoming active on a scale we have not seen since the 1960s. Of course student movements can go in various directions and their ultimate impact can be minimal or even negative. The question is what is the long term goal. Global Peace Youth Corps is trying to make that activism positive and international. Therein lies the potential.

The question remains, what are successful role models.

Noam Chomsky:

Well, we can look at the Civil Rights movement, a major development of the past 50 years. The Civil Rights movement didn't achieve all its ends by any means, but it brought about a very substantial progress. Well if you think about the Civil Rights movement, you perhaps think of Martin Luther King Jr., giving a speech in Washington, a big demonstration in 1963, the "I Have a Dream" speech, which I'm sure you know, which was a very important event, and Martin Luther King Jr. was an individual of great significance and honor, but he would have been the first to tell you that he was riding a wave that had been created by others, most of them young people, college students, young Black students who in, couple of years earlier, had decided to sit in lunch counters in the South, in Atlanta, where Blacks were forbidden to sit, but they went in and sat at the lunch counters where they were arrested, beaten, and taken away.

And then others began riding freedom buses, in the South to try to organize voters so that Black voters, who were heavily repressed and have been kept out of the political system almost entirely throughout all of the history of the country, that wasn't easy either. They were attacked and many were killed, some young people joined from the North, many of them were killed. They worked hard and they finally broke through, and it got to the point where there was a mass popular movement, there could be a major demonstration in Washington, some important legislation was passed and so on. It's not too different from what happened in Korea in the 1980s, when the dictatorship was overthrown.

And in case after case, when you look, you find that the young people are often at the forefront, just as they are in the Occupy movements today, whether it's in Spain or Wall Street or anywhere else. You have opportunities, the kind that you didn't have when you were a child, and you may not have when you're older. When you're older, embedded in institutions with demands that leave less opportunity and less choice, so as in the past, I think it's entirely natural that young people should be facing these burdens.

I should say it's the same in other domains. So I happen to be in a university that is devoted to the sciences, probably the leading science university in the world. In the university, students are not expected to sit, take notes, and repeat on a test what they're told. They're expected to challenge, to create, to invent, to come up with new proposals, to show that the conventional ideas that they are being taught are maybe incorrect and should be pursued in a different way. And in fact, very commonly, the best ideas and newest thinking comes out of the work of students, graduate students, in seminars, and in their own research. And it's for similar reasons they can think in new ways and often make great breakthroughs. And it's pretty much the same in political life. So I think that, it may seem to you unfair that the rich and the powerful aren't doing the kinds of things that should be done, but you can understand why they're not doing them, and you can also understand why people like you have the opportunity to change that, as has been done in the past.

Emanuel Pastreich:

I suppose one major challenge is how student activism can be linked to education. At Kyung Hee University, where I teach, we have embarked on a very ambitious project to establish a new liberal arts program, Humanitas College, that brings together education, civic education and public service. But can such an open system actually be established within the university? That is the major challenge for us today. Some students regard education as a paid-for service. They do not see any need to participate in anything. Then there are those who can only think in terms of getting their jobs. They have been lulled to sleep, thinking that the job interview is most important. Tragically, that job may not last very long and they may regret that they did not build friends for life at an earlier stage in their lives.

Student:

We now confront a radical neo-liberal system which seeks to turn everything into products and destroy our society and our environment. But if we want to move beyond this system, we must have a concept as to what can replace Neo-liberalism. What do you think is possible?

Noam Chomsky:

What system can replace the Neo-liberal system? Well just ask yourselves, why Korea developed from 1980 to the present, while Brazil went through 20 years of stagnation. One reason is that Korea never accepted the Neo-liberal policies, until the early 90s, and in the end it suffered from them. Through the 1980s, the big

growth period for Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Singapore, and in fact China, the East Asian economies, simply ignored the advice and demands imposed by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the US Treasury, the leading Western Powers- they ignored all of that advice. They followed a policy of state-guided industrial development, which turned out to be highly successful.

Latin America in contrast, followed the rules rigorously, and the economy stagnated and declined. So you know very well, at least one alternative, maybe not the best alternative. Later South Korea did come to accept these rules, and within a few years, fell into a terrible financial crisis in 1997-98, then it sort of pulled itself out.

So there are plenty of alternatives, it's not necessary to follow these rules. Furthermore, we can move way beyond that, to a really functioning democratic society. That means one in which decisions about all issues are in the hands of the people who are subject to those decisions, that means communities, work forces, so on. So for example, why should an enterprise, say a manufacturing plant, why should it owned and run by banks and managers some remote place, or even right on the scene?

Why should some be giving orders and others taking them? Work forces themselves, in the community in which they exist, can in principle, and I think should, ultimately get to the point where they can take over and run these enterprises democratically for themselves. And the same is true for every other institution. There's a convention, and a history, that says we have to follow orders given to us from above. There was once a convention, and some extent there still is, that women have to follow the orders given by males, by their husband, or some other male. There were, not long ago, and still in much of the world are systems where slaves have to follow the orders of masters.

Over history, these structures of hierarchy and domination have been gradually eroded, by no means far enough, but substantially so. So it's a different world than it was 50 years ago. Korea is dramatically the case, United States also. And that history hasn't ended. This process can go on. Anywhere that you see structure of authority and domination, whatever it is, whether it's in a family, or in international affairs, or anywhere in between, wherever you find a structure of authority and domination, you should always be asking, "is it legitimate?" It isn't self-justifying, it has to justify itself. Can it justify itself? Can this system of domination justify itself?

Whether it's a patriarchal family, management-run or owner-run enterprise, a world system in which a few great powers determine the rules, together with multinational corporations, of the World Trade Organization- are any these structures legitimate? Well they have to prove their legitimacy. They have a burden of proof. And if they can't meet it, which is usually the case, then it's our challenge to dismantle it and move on to a greater degree of freedom and justice. And I suppose that's a process without end. So you can sketch out what the alternatives ought to be, but piece by

piece, I think you can see how to approach, with particular kinds of repression, domination, authority, inequality that have no justification, and therefore can be and should be dismantled, as in the cases that I've mentioned, Civil Rights, Women's Rights, control over one's own work, many other things.

Emanuel Pastreich:

The problem is quite complex because a consumer society generates a population that is passive and expects to consume. We have had great activism in the past, although as we know in the case of Russia, activism can lead in the wrong direction. As long as the attitude is a consumers' perspective, activism and the role of citizens in running institutions will be extremely limited. Let us take the case of Disney World. No one who goes to Disney World thinks that they have to help clean up, or help make up the displays, or cook the food. The customer assumes that once he or she has paid for the ticket, everything is included in that price. Well citizens make the same assumption. They think that they do not have to clean parks, or take away garbage, or think about their communities much. They are paying certain fees and that should cover everything. I have seen many young people in Korea just throw garbage on the street. They assume someone else will pick it up and that they have no responsibility. We have to start by addressing this issue.

Student:

Let me ask you about the division of the Korean Peninsula today. Why is this still the case and how can we address it as young people?

Noam Chomsky:

In South and North Korea, the issues are quite different, than in India and Pakistan, for example. But here in Korea the problems are very severe, it goes back, far back to at least the end of the Second World War, where there was strong desire for unification throughout Korea. It never happened, you know reasons why, so I don't have to run through them, it led to devastating conflict that practically destroyed the region.

There's been recovery of different kinds. By now the two societies are radically different. North Korea is a highly repressive, struggling society, while South Korea is vital, industrial, growing society. The only sensible proposal that I've heard is to how they can move towards some form of reconciliation, is one or another variety of Sunshine Policy. They've had small successes, a lot of failures, but if there's an alternative, I've never heard it. And I think that those policies, or policies similar to

those, have to be pursued, no matter how frustrating and difficult they are. I've never heard an alternative suggestion and if young people can come up with one, that would be great. But the worst thing to do is to engage in provocation, such as military maneuvers on the borders and so on, which are just bound to lead to retaliation, and increased tensions, and possibly even another war.

Take a look at other parts of the world, the problems are different. Another major problem right on the international agenda is the Israel and Palestine conflict. Well in comparison with India and Pakistan, North and South Korea, that's an easy one. In fact, there's an overwhelming international consensus on how it should be resolved by two states settled on the internationally recognized border and that proposal actually reached the Security Council in 1976, 35 years ago, it was vetoed by the United States, and since that time, the US has along with Israel, have simply blocked it.

It's not the only factor involved, but it's the major one and remains so today. So Europe can have a very positive role if it chooses to do so, by trying to mediate the conflict and move towards the international consensus, but Europe has chosen once again simply to follow obediently after the United States, abandoning a possible role in world affairs. It's not a matter of logical necessity, but it's a matter of choice, a choice of action, on the part of the people who have a fair degree of opportunity. The world opinion is overwhelmingly in support of this, but the governments are not implementing it. Well then, okay, that means we need more democracy, more responsiveness to the people's will, and if that happens this could move forward.

Let's take another major issue in world affairs. It also has to do with nuclear weapons. One of the dominant topics of world affairs today is Iran's pursuit of nuclear programs, which some believe may lead to nuclear weapons development. Well, it's kind of interesting that in the region, in the Arab world nearby, Iran is not Arab, but in the Arab world nearby, majority opinion is -nobody wants Iran to have nuclear weapons, much too dangerous- but the majority opinion is that the region would be more secure if Iran did have nuclear weapons, which would balance, what Arab opinion sees as the major threat they face, mainly the United States and Israel.

Is there a way out of this impasse? Yes, there's a way and everyone knows what it is. It's to move towards a nuclear-weapons-free zone, in the region, which would include Iran, Israel; it would include US, and British and probably French forces that deploy nuclear weapons that would all be excluded by a nuclear-weapons-free zone. Well, such efforts have been made in other parts of the world, partially, and it's critically significant in this region, there's very strong support for it.

And interestingly just a few days ago, a poll in Israel found that the majority of Israelis are in favor of it, even if it would mean putting their own nuclear weapons under supervision. Why isn't it proceeding? Well, the great powers, and I'm sorry to say in this case primarily the United States, are impeding the effort. And here

domestic pressure inside the US, international pressure can make a difference.

Emanuel Pastreich:

I had the honor in Korea of working together with John Endicott, now president of Woosong University on his plan for a Limited Nuclear-Weapons Free Zone in Northeast Asia, a very significant track-two initiative focused on East Asia. If we can come up with a patchwork of nuclear-free zones around the world, we can set the stage for a nuclear free Earth and then, having put to bed that threat, we can concentrate our efforts on addressing the terrible challenges we face related to the degradation of the environment. It will stand as one of the great tragedies of our age that we failed to address the nuclear weapons issue effectively.

But nuclear weapons are the result of a larger, equally problematic phenomenon that is not the fault of any one individual or any one country. As Albert Einstein so clearly grasped, nuclear weapons are a result of the unprecedented rate of technological evolution today. Many of the phenomenon we witness seem to be the result of greedy individuals, and that is to some degree true, but at the same time IT, biotechnology and the new systems engendered by these technologies are also rapidly changing our societies and placing immense pressure on us.

Young people need to grasp the role that technology plays in shaping our world. Above all citizens must retake agency. We cannot be passive consumers of this world. We must be active participants, using our own imagination to redefine what are society does and what it means.