

# Noam Chomsky | De-Americanizing the World

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By [Noam Chomsky](#), [Truthout](#) / *Op-Ed*



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During the latest episode of the Washington farce that has astonished a bemused world, a Chinese commentator wrote that if the United States cannot be a responsible member of the world system, perhaps the world should become "de-Americanized" — and separate itself from the rogue state that is the reigning military power but is losing credibility in other domains.

The Washington debacle's immediate source was the sharp shift to the right among the political class. In the past, the U.S. has sometimes been described sardonically — but not inaccurately — as a one-party state: the business party, with two factions called Democrats and Republicans.

That is no longer true. The U.S. is still a one-party state, the business party. But it only has one faction: moderate Republicans, now called New Democrats (as the U.S. Congressional coalition styles itself).

There is still a Republican organization, but it long ago abandoned any pretense of being a normal parliamentary party. Conservative commentator Norman Ornstein of the American Enterprise Institute describes today's Republicans as "a radical insurgency — ideologically extreme, scornful of facts and compromise, dismissive of the legitimacy of its political opposition": a serious danger to the society.

The party is in lock-step service to the very rich and the corporate sector. Since votes cannot be obtained on that platform, the party has been compelled to mobilize sectors of the society that are extremist by world standards. Crazy is the new norm among Tea Party members and a host of others beyond the mainstream.

The Republican establishment and its business sponsors had expected to use them as a battering ram in the neoliberal assault against the population — to privatize, to deregulate and to limit government, while retaining those

parts that serve wealth and power, like the military.

The Republican establishment has had some success, but now finds that it can no longer control its base, much to its dismay. The impact on American society thus becomes even more severe. A case in point: the virulent reaction against the Affordable Care Act and the near-shutdown of the government.

The Chinese commentator's observation is not entirely novel. In 1999, political analyst Samuel P. Huntington warned that for much of the world, the U.S. is "becoming the rogue superpower," seen as "the single greatest external threat to their societies."

A few months into the Bush term, Robert Jervis, president of the American Political Science Association, warned that "In the eyes of much of the world, in fact, the prime rogue state today is the United States." Both Huntington and Jervis warned that such a course is unwise. The consequences for the U.S. could be harmful.

In the latest issue of *Foreign Affairs*, the leading establishment journal, David Kaye reviews one aspect of Washington's departure from the world: rejection of multilateral treaties "as if it were sport."

He explains that some treaties are rejected outright, as when the U.S. Senate "voted against the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2012 and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1999."

Others are dismissed by inaction, including "such subjects as labor, economic and cultural rights, endangered species, pollution, armed conflict, peacekeeping, nuclear weapons, the law of the sea, and discrimination against women."

Rejection of international obligations "has grown so entrenched," Kaye writes, "that foreign governments no longer expect Washington's ratification or its full participation in the institutions treaties create. The world is moving on; laws get made elsewhere, with limited (if any) American involvement."

While not new, the practice has indeed become more entrenched in recent years, along with quiet acceptance at home of the doctrine that the U.S. has every right to act as a rogue state.

To take a typical example, a few weeks ago U.S. special operations forces snatched a suspect, Abu Anas al-Libi, from the streets of the Libyan capital Tripoli, bringing him to a naval vessel for interrogation without counsel or rights. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry informed the press that the actions are legal because they comply with American law, eliciting no particular comment.

Principles are valid only if they are universal. Reactions would be a bit different, needless to say, if Cuban special forces kidnapped the prominent terrorist Luis Posada Carriles in Miami, bringing him to Cuba for interrogation and trial in accordance with Cuban law.

Such actions are restricted to rogue states. More accurately, to the one rogue state that is powerful enough to act with impunity: in recent years, to carry out aggression at will, to terrorize large regions of the world with drone attacks, and much else.

And to defy the world in other ways, for example by persisting in its embargo against Cuba despite the long-term opposition of the entire world, apart from Israel, which voted with its protector when the United Nations again condemned the embargo (188-2) in October.

Whatever the world may think, U.S. actions are legitimate because we say so. The principle was enunciated by the eminent statesman Dean Acheson in 1962, when he instructed the American Society of International Law that no legal issue arises when the United States responds to a challenge to its "power, position, and prestige."

Cuba committed that crime when it beat back a U.S. invasion and then had the audacity to survive an assault designed to bring "the terrors of the earth" to Cuba, in the words of Kennedy adviser and historian Arthur Schlesinger.

When the U.S. gained independence, it sought to join the international community of the day. That is why the Declaration of Independence opens by expressing concern for the "decent respect to the opinions of mankind."

A crucial element was evolution from a disorderly confederacy to a unified "treaty-worthy nation," in diplomatic historian Eliga H. Gould's phrase, that observed the conventions of the European order. By achieving this status, the new nation also gained the right to act as it wished internally.

It could thus proceed to rid itself of the indigenous population and to expand slavery, an institution so "odious" that it could not be tolerated in England, as the distinguished jurist William Murray, Earl of Mansfield, ruled in 1772. Evolving English law was a factor impelling the slave-owning society to escape its reach.

Becoming a treaty-worthy nation thus conferred multiple advantages: foreign recognition, and the freedom to act at home without interference. Hegemonic power offers the opportunity to become a rogue state, freely defying international law and norms, while facing increased resistance abroad and contributing to its own decline through self-inflicted wounds.

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## [NOAM CHOMSKY](#)

Noam Chomsky's most recent book is "Occupy." Chomsky is emeritus professor of linguistics and philosophy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Mass.

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