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Italy

Chomsky, Tariq Ali criticise Rifondazione on Afghanistan, back antiwar MPs

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World-famous academic and peace campaigner Noam Chomsky, and well known writer and socialist campaigner Tariq Ali have added their voices to those calling for Rifondazione to change its position on Italian troops in Afghanistan and backing antiwar MPs. Here we publish Tariq's open letter to Fausto Bertinotti and Chomsky's statement, with an introduction by Gilbert Achcar.

Introduction by Gilbert Achcar

Eight members of the Italian Senate and two members of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, all belonging to the left-wing of the ruling coalition (l'Unione, led by Prime Minister Romano Prodi) have announced their intention to vote against the government on the issue of Afghanistan.

Silvio Berlusconi, Italy's previous Premier and George W. Bush's buddy, had sent 1,300 Italian troops to Afghanistan as a component of the Nato force operating there, as well as 2,600 troops to Iraq as part of Bush's "coalition of the willing."

The new "center-left" government, betraying the expectations of the majority of its electors, has announced a phased withdrawal of troops from Iraq that doesn't differ much from the one Berlusconi had already negotiated with the US government. At the same time, l'Unione has proclaimed its intention to extend the mission of Italian troops in Afghanistan, despite the fact that Nato forces in that country, recently redeployed toward the South, are increasingly engaged in war activities, acting as US auxiliary forces.

Even if Italian troops were not sent to the South, they would nevertheless be part of Nato's war-machine. The Afghan people are of course entitled to security, but neither US troops, nor the troops of the US-dominated Nato, can provide this.

Since l'Unione holds no majority in the Senate without the eight Senators, there is tremendous pressure being exerted on the latter to get them to change their stance, in the name of coalition solidarity and interest, including a threat to move the decree by means of a vote of confidence that would face them with the choice between renegeing on their stance or letting the government fall.

However, the latter threat is defused by the announcement by some members of the "center-right" that they will vote for the decree extending the mission of Italian troops in Afghanistan, as they don't want to abstain on an issue that they support wholeheartedly, particularly since the Afghan deployment was initiated by the Berlusconi government to which they belonged.

To counter the pressures exerted on them, the antiwar MPs have launched a petition and called for expressions of support. These will be reported at an important antiwar assembly, organized by the Peace movement and the antiwar MPs, to be held in Rome on July 15. The debate and vote in the Senate will take place in the last week of July.

The build-up of support, including international support, for the antiwar Italian MPs is thus very important for their fight and their ability to resist the pressure. To support the anti-war MPs, sign the petition, link at the bottom of this page.

AN OPEN LETTER TO FAUSTO BERTINOTTI

Dear Fausto,

[https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/Tariqchomsky_copy.jpg]

Noam Chomsky (right) and Tariq Ali

I was surprised to hear that Rifondazione was preparing to vote in favour of keeping Italian troops in Afghanistan, for 'humanitarian reasons'. I want to try and convince you that this would be a serious error, just as I argued in the last century with those on the left, who supported the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan.

Big powers or surrogate states acting on their behalf have no right to occupy countries. The two big projects of the global neo-liberal order have been (1) to insist that the new capitalism is the 'sole' way of organising humankind from now till the planet implodes and (2) to disregard national sovereignty as a key to international relations in the name of 'human rights'.

A few weeks after 9/11, I debated a leading Bush ideologue, Charles Krauthammer for one hour on Canadian television. He admitted that the war in Afghanistan was as I had put it 'a crude war of revenge.'

Three days ago the CIA disbanded its special unit created to track and exterminate Osama Bin Laden, a tacit acknowledgement that the situation had changed drastically since 9/11. So what is the function of NATO armies in Afghanistan. 'Human Rights'? Even conservative journalists in Britain (whose soldiers are being killed regularly) would laugh at any such assumption. One of them, Simon Jenkins, recently returned from a trip to Kabul and wrote a public warning to Blair:

"The debacle of Britain-in-Afghanistan cannot be ignored, because British troops are at risk. They were never meant to be at risk and their presence in that country has nothing to do with British security.

"They are sweltering and dying in Helmand not to prop up an embattled regime in Kabul, for which they are hopelessly undermanned, but to keep NATO alive in Europe, an unworthy mission... How did the Americans induce Nato in 2004 to become Hamid Karzai's mercenary army? What intelligence did the cabinet receive from Washington, where officials openly spoke of dumping Afghanistan on uppity NATO to teach it a lesson after the Balkan

shambles? ...Every assessment I have heard suggests that the sort of campaign envisaged by the government in southern Afghanistan would require not 3,000 or even 10,000 troops, but over 100,000. Even the latter total has failed in Iraq, and Iraqis cannot hold a candle to

Afghans for insurgent fanaticism." (The Guardian, 5 July, 2006)

There is simply no excuse for the NATO presence in Afghanistan except that of pleasing Washington. In recent weeks the killing of Afghan civilians has increased tenfold. Headlines which speak of '500 Taliban killed' are deliberate disinformation. As was predicted by some of us at the time, the Afghans do not like being occupied and would begin to resist sooner or later. Fausto, ask yourself why there should be any foreign troops there at all.

That the centre-left supports NATO and backs most US wars is well-known. Let them do it with the support of Fini, Bossi and Berlusconi (they are, after all, of the same opinion).

Why should the occupation of a foreign country be treated as a vote of confidence? And if it is the honest answer has

to be: we do not have any confidence in the NATO presence in Afghanistan. For Rifondazione to vote in favour would be a tragedy for the European Left and I fear can only lead to disasters both in Afghanistan and in terms of creating an alternative in Italy.

If you get into arguments such as the character of the regime that might follow a Western withdrawal you will be swimming in a dangerous sea. Don't forget the pathetic imperial past of your own state. The invasions of Albania and Abyssinia by Mussolini were explained by the same logic: we are taking European civilization to these backward feudal monarchic states. Regime change was not acceptable then and it should not be now.

I write as an old friend of Rifondazione. I hope I can remain one after the vote next Tuesday.

Yours fraternally,

Tariq Ali

Noam Chomsky's Letter to the Italian Antiwar MPs

Dear friends,

I have learned of your courageous stand against Italy's participation in military operations of NATO, as it is being converted into an international intervention force subordinate to the United States.

Expansion of NATO to the East, in violation of firm guarantees to Gorbachev when he agreed to a unified Germany within NATO, was already a very serious threat to international peace and security, even apart from the deceit.

The new and still more expansive role NATO is assuming poses serious threats to international order. I would like to express my personal appreciation for your insistence on upholding the principles of Article 11 of the Italian Constitution, that "Italy repudiates war as an instrument of offence against the liberty of other peoples and as a means of resolving international disputes; accepts, on the condition of equality with the other States, the limitations on sovereignty required for an order which ensures peace and justice between nations; promotes and encourages the international organisations established with that end."

Sincerely yours,

Noam Chomsky

For more information and to sign the appeal against Italian troops in Afghanistan visit the [Sinistra Critica](#) (Critical Left) website.