

By Kamil Dada and Alex Yu

From [The Stanford Daily](#) | Original Article

Speakers demand U.S. officials be held accountable for 'war crimes'

About 200 students and Bay Area activists gathered in White Plaza Sunday evening to listen to renowned intellectual Noam Chomsky speak about war crimes. The rally focused on holding U.S. officials - in particular, Hoover Fellow and political science Prof. Condoleezza Rice - accountable for their actions during the years of the Bush administration.

But Chomsky, professor emeritus of linguistics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, did not specifically single out Rice and instead urged students to think about two issues: government accountability and university policy.

In terms of accountability, Chomsky said there was no debate. "The U.N. charter [states that] any threat of force, such as the current threat against Iran, is a criminal offense and a violation of the fundamental international standards," he said. "The Nuremberg tribunal defined aggression and aggressive war as the supreme international crime."

As a result, he argued, those responsible for aggression against another state have committed the "ultimate crime" and should be held accountable for all the crimes that followed as a result of war.

Chomsky also defended the notion that a university should not consider the extracurricular activities of its faculty in determining their qualifications to teach, but instead should ask if they are fulfilling university responsibility.

He drew a comparison to a hypothetical political economist at Stanford who decided to "rob banks and burn them down" before coming back to Stanford and teaching a course on economics.

"At that point, the university does have a decision to make in terms of whether that person is fulfilling the university responsibilities," Chomsky declared.

Fellow speaker and history Prof. Joel Beinin said he fully supports the right of any faculty member to teach freely and without any interference. Nevertheless, he made some exceptions to this policy, questioning whether it is appropriate for former government officials who enacted controversial policies to teach classes.

"Perhaps, after a record of major policy failure, one ought not to be invited to advise the government and one ought not to be considered an academic superstar," he suggested. "If that policy failure is relevant to what we are teaching at the university, students be aware - you may be receiving damaged goods."

In an interview with The Daily on March 3, 2009, Rice said she aimed to teach classes by winter quarter of this year, but she is not listed as teaching any classes this academic year in the Stanford Bulletin.

The organizing party, Stanford Says No to War, initiated a petition in May 2009, which called for Rice to be held accountable for any serious violations of the law, including ratified treaties, statutes or the U.S. Constitution. As of Sunday, the petition had garnered 1,245 signatures from students, faculty, staff, alumni and other community members. After the rally, the organization led a group of roughly 50 chanting protestors to Hoover Tower to affix the petition to the wall of the building.

Sandra Drake, professor emeritus of English, also spoke at the rally and explained why she signed the petition.

"I signed it because I am opposed to torture," she said. "Once I wouldn't have thought it

necessary to explain why I opposed torture, but our communal and public discourse has degenerated to the point where some people accept it. I'm opposed to torture because it is based on a perversion of empathy."

In a somewhat tumultuous yet expected first six months at Stanford for the former Secretary of State, Rice has seen numerous protests against her return. An event entitled "Condival" featured mock waterboarding and students in orange jumpsuits. Rice also engaged with the student body on numerous occasions by visiting student dorm complexes, but was occasionally questioned by students about her role in the alleged use of torture.

Student organizers of the rally encouraged continued activism. Shara Esbenshade '12, for one, said students should not shy away from voicing concerns against the presence of high government officials with whom they disagree on important policies.

"It is our responsibility to speak up," she said. "Our silence would be tacit approval."