Book Review

World Orders, Old and New

Noam Chomsky. Boulder, CO: Pluto Press, 1994, pp. 272

The catch phrase "new world order" has shaped the view of the future differently for various groups and people. It has been associated mostly with former American president George Bush, who witnessed the end of the old system with the collapse of the Soviet Union and, with others, realized the beginning of a new order. Prior to the end of the cold war, Third World countries were calling for "new economic and political orders." Speaking before the General Assembly of the United Nations, Fidel Castro called for the establishment of a "new world order based on justice, on equity, on peace." And an altogether different new world order has been anticipated in the near future by such evangelists as Pat Robertson in his book *The New World Order*. Robertson believes the new order will commence with the return of the Messiah, who will erect a new and just world.

However, for prominent scholar Noam Chomsky, the new world order is merely a continuation of the old one. From the basis of three lectures delivered at the American University in Cairo in May 1993, Chomsky wrote *World Orders, Old and New*. The book is divided into three parts.

The first part discusses the cold war and how it was used by the superpowers to justify all foreign and domestic political, economic, and military actions. "The Cold War provided easy formulas to justify criminal actions abroad and entrenchment of privileges at home." Both sides were able to claim that such atrocities were committed to promote the "national security which was threatened by the other side."

The cold war, he argues, was justified on the basis of security needs. He analyzed "NSC 68," a report written in 1950, that outlined the security needs and dealt with the issue of "national security." However, Chomsky stresses that national security did not refer to the security of the nation per se but rather to the security of a nation's economic and political goals.

Chomsky points to Winston Churchill's view of the new world order:

> The government of the world must be entrusted to satisfied nations who wished nothing more for themselves than what they had. If the world government were in the hands of hungry nations, there would always be danger. But none of us had any reason to seek for anything more. The peace would be kept by peoples who lived in their own way and were not ambitious. Our power placed us above the rest. We were like rich men dwelling at peace with their habitations.

Chomsky argues that rich men have ambitions and they always look for new ways to dominate others. He also stresses the notion that it is misleading to treat nations as the actors in world politics. He points to class analysis as a method of exploiting international politics.

Chomsky concludes that the guidelines for the new world order according to Churchill could be seen as follows:

> the rich men of the rich societies are to rule the world, competing among themselves for a greater share of wealth and power and mercilessly suppressing those who stand in their way, assisted by the rich men of the hungry nations who do their bidding. The other serve, and suffer.

The cold war policies continued to persist and sometimes intensified after the end of the cold war. Chomsky points to the positive side of the cold war and what he called "population control," where the American government was able to control the American people: "Before the Bolshevik takeover, the population had to be mobilized in fear of the Huns, the British, and other devils, foreign and indigenous." The cold war has also helped the United States to continue its old concurring policies by choosing a new enemy to replace the Soviets. In the late 1980s, the United States promoted the idea that Noriega posed as great a threat as that of the Soviets. Or more recently, the United States portrayed Saddam Hussein as a new Hitler who would threaten the entire world.

According to Chomsky, the dangerous outcome as a result of the cold war's demise is the ability of the United States and Britain to mobilize a vast force throughout the world without being challenged:

> In plain English, U.S. violence, terror, robbery, and exploitation will be able to proceed without the annoying impediments portrayed as the Kremlin's "global designs" in the official culture.

The author used Iraq as a test case where western policies were carried out in the new order. For Chomsky, the Gulf War was a "Gulf slaughter, the term 'war' hardly applies to a confrontation in which one side massacres the other from a safe distance, meanwhile wrecking the civilian society."

On human rights, Chomsky is critical of such western human rights groups as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Such organizations claim that they "work to promote all the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international standards." In reality, however, these organizations are only committed to the western standards of human rights, which do not promote social and economic rights. Meanwhile, the United States does not recognize the universality of the declaration and has rejected its social and economic rights.

With regard to the North–South conflict, Chomsky offers a brilliant explanation of how the cold war was actually a part of the North–South conflict. He argues that the essence of the North–South confrontation is the emergence of independent nationalism ("ultranationalism," "economic nationalism," "radical nationalism"). This "ultranationalism" is not acceptable to the North, because it changes the role of the Third World from a provider of cheap labor and services to an independent region.

Chomsky continues to argue that Eastern Europe was the original "Third World." The West had an unequal relationship with Eastern Europe, which provided service and cheap labor. However, when the Bolsheviks launched their revolution in Russia, such a move was considered "ultranationalistic" by the West. Therefore, the Soviets had to be brought back to the old relationship, and this was the beginning of the cold war.

The second part deals with the political-economic order. Chomsky argues that American politicians started planning American world domination at the outbreak of the Second World War. However, they realized that they needed to secure the home front first and "reshape the American society in a particular way." The first step to secure home was to control the labor movements. Chomsky argues that the Great Depression of the 1930s, contrary to what the capitalists thought, actually added to the credibility of the workers. This credibility was elevated, especially after adopting the Wagner Act of 1935, which granted rights to American workers. As a result of this victory by the workers, the business establishment waged

> campaigns to mobilize the public against "outsiders" preaching "communism and anarchy" and seeking to disrupt the communities

> of sober working men and farmers, housewives tending to their families, hard-working executives toiling day and night to serve the people—"Americanism," in which all share alike in joy and harmony.

Chomsky points to the role of intellectuals in supporting the government's views. Harold Lasswell, a leading political scientist, and Walter Lippmann, the dean of American journalism, were named, among others who thought that there is a great segment of the public that is ignorant and needs leadership and guidance.

Controlling the public mind is also exercised in free societies in an indirect manner. In this regard, Chomsky quotes the writing of George Well, who wrote "the sinister fact about literary censorship in England is that it is largely voluntary. Unpopular ideas can be silenced, and inconvenient facts kept dark, without any need for any official ban."

On the nature the new world order's contours, Chomsky shares the views and quotes from many other journalists. These views share the felling that "the de facto world government" that is taking shape: the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the Group of Seven (G-7), the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and other structures are designed to serve the interests of transnational corporations (TNCs), banks, and investment firms in a 'new imperial age.'" He also quotes the South Commission, which wrote that "the most powerful countries in the North have become a de facto board of management for the world economy, protecting their interests and imposing their will on the South."

As for the new World Trade Organization (WTO) that replaced GATT, Chomsky argues that the WTO will work closely with the IMF and the World Bank, a relationship that he calls a "new institutional trinity." The WTO's regulations would control only the economic relations of the developing nations, for industrialized rich states will "make their own deals . . . outside the normal channels . . . in G-7 meetings and elsewhere."

Free trade, for Chomsky, is a very misleading term. He does not consider the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to be a free trade agreement, for it is a relationship in which the United States owns 40 percent of the trade, which "is intrafirm, centrally managed by the same highly visible hands that control planning, production, and investment." He also questions the American politicians' insistence that the United States stands for free trade worldwide. Chomsky points out that out of the 116 sanction cases used since the Second World War, 80 percent were initiated by the United States against Third World countries.

The third part, "History's Greatest Prize," is devoted to the Middle East and examines the history of American involvement in the region. Concerning the recent Oslo Agreement, Chomsky argues that it is a result of the PLO's loss of legitimacy among the Palestinians. He blames the PLO for not establishing "people-to-people contacts" in the United States. He reasons that it would have been helpful for the PLO to have attempted to gain

popular support in the United States during the time when it enjoyed wealth and the support of the people living in the occupied territories.

In evaluating the current situation of the Arab world, Chomsky writes:

> The Arab world is passing though a crucial moment in its history. It has rich human resources, cultural and intellectual. It also has rich material resources—noticeably oil, a wasting resource that will be gone in a few generations. If these resources are used to enrich sectors of the West and local elements that serve their interests, the people of the region will face a tragedy of incalculable proportions in the not-too-distant future.

As a conclusion, Chomsky writes that "as for the New World Order, it is very much like the old, yet, in a new guise. There are important developments, notably the increasing generalization of the economy with its consequences, including the sharpening of class differences on a global scale, and the extension of this system in the former Soviet domains."

The only reservation about this book is that the author overquotes other writers. Sometimes it is hard to know whether one is reading Chomsky's ideas or those of someone else. This might be attributed to the fact that many scholars have shied away from a critical analysis of the West, and Chomsky wants to demonstrate to the reader that there are other scholars who share his views.

As with the rest of Chomsky's works, this book is very interesting. Its uniqueness is that it echoes what is in the minds of many Third World scholars. It could have been written by any one of them, but for many western scholars this book will be examined more seriously because it is written by a westerner.

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