

Review: Terrorising the Neighbourhood

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Terrorizing the Neighbourhood by Noam Chomsky, (AK Press)

Noam Chomsky is known to many on the left as a leading US dissident. Fewer people are aware that he is an anarchist. A major part of his writings deal with American foreign policy and this work is of some importance as anarchism is often criticised as having no analysis of imperialism.

Terrorizing the Neighbourhood is based around a speech Chomsky made in January of 1990, shortly after the US invasion of Panama. It seeks to map out what US foreign policy meant in the Cold War and what its probable direction will be in future. It also challenges some of the established conceptions of what the Cold War meant and as such should be read not just as an introduction to US foreign policy but also by those on the left who find now that their world view collapsed with the collapse of the USSR.

COLD WAR

The general presentation of post-war history from Right and Left alike was of a history dominated by clashes between two superpowers. In fact the two superpowers were never equal. The Soviet Union never approached the US in terms of economic or military strength. The Cold War was used by the rulers of both countries to maintain a consensus at home, a consensus that kept them both in power. For the most part the war meant war with its satellites for the Soviet Union. For the US it meant war on the third world. Both sides used the rhetoric of a threat from the other to justify its actions and retain a consensus at home in favour of intervention abroad.

The power of this consensus is demonstrated in the US by the fact that all the factions of the ruling class were united behind the 'right' of the US to intervene anywhere it liked. From liberals to conservatives this was unchallenged, the arguments that occurred were over tactics. During the Contra war in Nicaragua the US media freely argued over the tactics of pulling Nicaragua into line with US interests. Many did not see the Contra war as the best option yet the "right" of the US to dictate to Nicaragua went for the most part unquestioned.

The end of the Cold War meant the end of the all-powerful Soviet excuse. Panama was significant because it was the first post war US invasion not defended by reference to a Soviet 'threat'. Instead the drug war was invented as a substitute. Since then a range of "would be Hitler's" have been the excuse for US intervention. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about these new threats has been the willingness of the population to accept them as real. The Soviet Union at least had real military power, ICBM's and nuclear warheads. The new "threats" to world peace seem to have little more than Uzi's and large quantities of rusting, outdated Soviet tanks.

DISCIPLINING THE THIRD WORLD

Chomsky effectively exposes post-war US foreign policy. It was not about countering the Soviet Union or even halting the spread of "communism". Rather it was about destroying any opposition to US interests throughout the third world. US interests did not mean what was good for people in the US but what was good for the \$9 billion invested by corporations in Latin America. Nationalist governments like those of Nicaragua and Cuba which sought to pursue an independent economic line threatened little more than the profits of big business. The communists the

US was supposedly fighting included everything from actual Communist parties to nationalists, priests and community workers.

These are the strengths of Chomsky's pamphlet, its analysis of what US policy was about. There is little discussion however about the next step, the struggle against imperialism of whatever variety. Chomsky ends with the hope that the introduction of rival imperialist powers in the shape of Japan and Europe will create a confusion that the "indigenous popular forces" will be able to take advantage of. He sees solidarity movements in the imperialist heartlands helping these movements through their own efforts and by influencing 'their' governments.

Imperialism however is part and parcel of 20th century capitalism. Its driving force is not so much in the planning rooms of government offices but rather the boards of thousands of corporations. Ruling classes may decide their interests lie in a greater or lesser degree of intervention but no long term gains can be made in this way. Likewise nationalist regimes pursuing an independent economic path will be dependant on whatever policy the imperialists are providing at the time. Improvements made one year will always be subject to being carpet bombed the next.

FROM BOSNIA TO BELFAST

The defeat of imperialism on a permanent basis will require a movement fighting not only in the fields and towns of Latin America but also in the cities of the United States. It must be a movement of workers, controlled by workers. Our role as revolutionaries is not only to understand the workings of imperialism but also to start laying the foundations of such a movement.

This should not be an excuse for inactivity now. Our role is to argue for the defeat of the imperialists wherever they intervene from northern Ireland to Iraq to Yugoslavia. In Ireland we oppose any involvement in UN or EC policing operations on behalf of imperialism while starting to build a movement north and south with the aim of forcing British withdrawal from the north and the introduction of an anarchist society based on need and not on greed.

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