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# Invasion Newspeak: U.S. & USSR

Noam Chomsky

December 1989

In May 1983, a remarkable event took place in Moscow. A courageous newscaster, Vladimir Danchev, denounced the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in five successive radio broadcasts extending over five days, calling upon the rebels to resist. This aroused great admiration in the West. The **New York Times** (8/6/83) commented accurately that this was a departure from the official Soviet propaganda line, that Danchev had “revolted against the standards of doublethink and newspeak.” Danchev was taken off the air and sent to a psychiatric hospital. When he was returned to his position several months later, a Russian official was quoted as saying that “he was not punished, because a sick man cannot be punished.”

What was particularly remarkable about Danchev’s radio broadcasts was not simply that he expressed opposition to the Soviet invasion and called for resistance to it, but that he called it an “invasion.” In Soviet theology, there is no such event as the Russian invasion of Afghanistan; rather, there is a Russian defense of Afghanistan against bandits operating from Pakistani sanctuaries and supported by the CIA and other warmongers.

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Retrieved on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2021 from [chomsky.info](http://chomsky.info)  
From *FAIR*, December, 1989

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The Russians claim they were invited in, and in a certain technical sense this is correct. But as the **London Economist** grandly proclaimed (10/25/80), “An invader is an invader unless invited in by a government with some claim to legitimacy,” and the government installed by the USSR to invite them in can hardly make such a claim, outside the world of Orwellian newspeak.

Implicit in the coverage of the Danchev affair in the West was a note of self-congratulation: It couldn’t happen here — no U.S. newscaster has been sent to a psychiatric hospital for calling a U.S. invasion “an invasion” or for calling on the victims to resist. We might, however, inquire further into just why this has never happened. One possibility is that the question has never arisen because no mainstream U.S. journalist has ever mimicked Danchev’s courage, or could even perceive that a U.S. invasion of the Afghan type is in fact an invasion.

Consider the following facts. In 1962, the United States attacked South Vietnam. In that year, President John F. Kennedy sent the U.S. Air Force to attack rural South Vietnam, where more than 80 percent of the population lived. This was part of a program intended to drive several million people into concentration camps (called “strategic hamlets”) where they would be surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards. This would “protect” these people from the guerrillas whom, we conceded, they were largely supporting.

The direct U.S. attack against South Vietnam followed our support for the French attempt to reconquer their former colony, our disruption of the 1954 “peace process,” and a terrorist war against the South Vietnamese population. This terror had already left some 75,000 dead while evoking domestic resistance, supported from the northern half of the country after 1959, that threatened to bring down the regime that the U.S. had established. In the following years, the U.S. continued to resist every attempt at peaceful settlement, and in 1964 began to plan the ground invasion of South Vietnam. The land assault took place in early 1965, accompanied by the bombing

of North Vietnam and an intensification of the bombing of the south, at triple the level of the more publicized bombing of the north. The U.S. also extended the war to Laos and Cambodia.

The U.S. protested that it was invited in, but as the **Economist** recognized in the case of Afghanistan (never in the case of Vietnam), “an invader is an invader unless invited in by a government with some claim to legitimacy,” and outside the world of newspeak, the client regime established by the U.S. had no more legitimacy than the Afghan regime established by the USSR. Nor did the U.S. regard this government as having any legitimacy; in fact, it was regularly overthrown and replaced when its leaders appeared to be insufficiently enthusiastic about U.S. plans to escalate the terror. Throughout the war, the U.S. openly recognized that a political settlement was impossible, for the simple reason that the “enemy” would win handily in a political competition — which the U.S. therefore deemed unacceptable.

For the past 25 years I have been searching to find some reference in mainstream journalism or scholarship to a U.S. invasion of South Vietnam, or U.S. aggression in Indochina — without success. Instead I find a U.S. defense of South Vietnam against terrorists supported from outside (namely, from Vietnam), a defense that was unwise, the doves maintain.

In short, there are no Danchevs here. Within the mainstream, there is no one who can call an invasion “an invasion,” or even perceive the fact; it is unimaginable that any U.S. journalist would have publicly called upon the South Vietnamese to resist the U.S. invasion. Such a person would not have been sent to a psychiatric hospital, but it’s doubtful that he would have retained his professional position and standing.

Note that here it takes no courage to tell the truth, merely honesty. We cannot plead fear of state violence, as followers of the party line can in a totalitarian state.