

BOOK REVIEWS

Noam Chomsky. World Orders Old and New. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, 311 p, ISBN 0-231-10156-2

In 1993 at the American University in Cairo, Noam Chomsky, a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who is best known for his theory of transformational grammar, delivered three lectures on recent developments in international affairs and the American role in it. This book is a considerably expanded and updated version of these lectures.

The first chapter is a resume of the cold war in which Chomsky brilliantly demonstrates the essential identity of goals and methods of the two superpowers. The second chapter gives a trenchant analysis of Western, particularly American, foreign policy over the past hundred years, with particular emphasis on the years since 1945. The book concludes in the third chapter with a case study of American policy in the Middle East, obviously of special interest to Chomsky's audience in Cairo. Much of the book deals with American domestic politics and events in Europe and Latin America and is therefore not of primary concern to readers of this journal. There are, however, some parts, particularly in the sections called "Looking Ahead" and "The Contours of the New World Order" in the second chapter, that offer insights applicable to Asia in general and Mongolia in particular and thus are worth commenting on in these pages.

At the heart of the new world order lies what Chomsky calls "the global catastrophe of capitalism" which now imposes on countries which have recently been subjected to the mechanism of a market economy trends which already are well advanced in older capitalist countries, such as the United States. Most notable among them is class polarization, with small clusters of extremely rich persons emerging while the rest of the population, particularly workers, sees their living standards decline year after year. This, Chomsky points out, is a phenomenon not restricted to poor countries but is also found in places like the United States and Europe. A close corollary is the rapid decline of working standards everywhere but especially in this planet's so-called underdeveloped regions. With surgical precision, Chomsky exposes the American double standard when it comes to human rights. He documents in considerable detail the slave-like conditions created in scores of factories in Southern China and Thailand that are run wholly or partly by and for foreign companies. The frequent deaths in these capitalist sweatshops never elicit any official concerns over human rights. On the other hand, goods made in Chinese prisons have

caused a tremendous hue and cry in official Washington circles because, as Chomsky rightly observes, these goods, made in government facilities, compete directly with goods from privately owned factories. He adds, as the *coup de grace*, the well-known fact that American states, including California and Oregon, export prison-made goods.

In summary, this book is extremely good at describing the unfolding “new order” but leaves this reviewer disappointed because it ends without ever seriously attempting to prescribe a better alternative. One is left with sporadic hints, like “How far can this go? Will popular resistance, which must itself become internationalized to succeed, be able to dismantle these evolving structures of violence and domination, and carry forth the centuries-old process of expansion of freedom, justice, and democracy that is how being aborted, even reversed?” (p.188)

The New Geopolitics of Central Asia and its Borderlands. Edited by AH Annualize and Myron Weiner. Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994, 284 p. ISBN 0-253-20918-8

Among books recently arrived in Ulaanbaatar is this compendium of some eleven articles which, as the editors explain in their introductory essay, grew out of a series of workshops at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

In its introduction, the book starts with the premise that all major empires in the twentieth century dissolved into civil wars and regional conflicts and then asks why this is so. It offers four major reasons. The first cause is animosities, some preceding the empire and now reemerging and others created by the imperial power as it placed outsiders in positions of power. Second, an empire’s internal borders seldom coincide with existing ethnic, linguistic, and religious boundaries because they usually reflect the way in which the empire grew. A third reason for conflict is that successor states are usually weak. During the imperial period, all important institutions were run by the imperial power so that successor states have not enough trained manpower to run these institutions later on. Finally, quarrels within and among successor states frequently get internationalized as one or more of these states seek external support.

The eleven contributors apply this four-point model to the six Soviet successor states in Central Asia- Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Azerbaijan - and find their experiences since independence fit the model rather closely. The book also includes these states’ relationships with the four Muslim countries of Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, which the

editors justify on three grounds. They consider geography the first and most important reason and offer various rationales, including common borders. What they fail to mention, however, and quite possibly are not even aware of is that Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tuva are not only neighbors of some of the successor states but are very much part of Central Asia. The second reason, historic ties (including ethnic, linguistic and religious ones), seems solid at first right until one is reminded that the same could be said about Mongolia, Xinjiang and Tuva; in fact, one could make a considerably stronger case for including those neighbors than, say, Pakistan. The third reason, "the way in which each republic defines its own identity" (p.11), is rather out of place. Whatever the intrinsic merits of this aspect may be and one could see considerable merit- this reason clearly should not be lumped together with the other two.

The main part of the book consists of four sections. The first section contains three chapters offering an overview of the new situation in Central Asia, including discussions of political leaders and possible sources of future instability. The next two sections are for the most part case studies of specific countries, one describing Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Azerbaijan, and the other dealing with Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The two sections are somewhat complementary, with each including views of the other.

The final section presents views from Russia and the United States. Mikhail Konarovsky, the author of the first chapter and currently an employee of the Russian embassy in Washington, is rather more optimistic than the other contributors who see mostly problems ahead for the successor states: weak economies, drugs, weapons, crime-in short, and a continuation into the foreseeable future of what the world has been watching on the nightly television newscast. In contrast, Konarovsky predicts "the emergence of a new, large Asian economic community based on a strong ethnic and religious identity" (p. 239). He sees the key to securing Russia's vital interests in Central Asia in close relations with Kazakhstan with which it shares several aspects and interests. This special relationship has already begun with a Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Assistance between Moscow and Almaty. Nancy Lubin, in her brief recitation of American objectives, waxes rhapsodic over Central Asia's "vast resource base-including the largest gold mine in the world, enormous reserves of copper and other non-ferrous metals..."(p.261) but worries that American businessmen may have a difficult time in getting their hands on this cornucopia because of present and future conflicts in the area, lack of infrastructure, and so forth. She argues forcefully and persuasively that America should view these problems in the

same manner as the opportunities, that is, not as some remote, exotic phenomenon but as something that affects the United States directly and immediately.

Dannreuther, Roland. Creating New States in Central Asia: The Strategic Implications of the Collapse of Soviet Power in Central Asia. London; International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1994, 83 p.: map; 22 cm (Adelphi papers; 288)

Dannreuther, who at the time of writing this essay was a research associate at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, does a creditable job of sketching the first two years of independence of the five new Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan.

His essay is divided into three main chapters, in which he discusses the historical legacy, the years of 1991 -93, and the regional and international context, followed by a concluding chapter.

Dannreuther starts out by claiming that the dire forecasts made for these states at the time of the Soviet Union's demise have been proven wrong.

The main feature, as the author sees it, of Central Asia's post-Soviet years was the notion of a "Great Game," allegedly played by Turkey and Iran in which the two countries were vying to become the predominant external power in the region. This has not happened for essentially three reasons, so the author tails us. Iran has not lived up to its made in America caricature of promoting terror and Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia; instead, it has, like any good neighbor, been helpful in a variety of practical, economic matters and has earned good will from the secular leaders of the five states. As for Turkey, its efforts, strongly abetted by Europeans and Americans, to become the major external power began to collapse as soon as it became patently clear that it had neither the political nor economic muscle to achieve its goal. The most important reason, however, is that Russia confounded most political soothsayers and did not withdraw from Central Asia but, on the contrary, vigorously maintained its dominant position. Russia's continued predominance has been helped by some powerful forces, among them the absence of an anti-colonial struggle in the new states, and the perceived mutual advantage of maintaining a web of interdependence in defense and the economy.

Dannreuther predicts this Russian-Central Asian symbiosis to continue for a long time, thus making it difficult if not impossible for any external power to become important in the affairs of these new states.

It goes without saying that a few years' experience is a narrow plank on which to make one's prognostications, but so far, Dannreuther's analysis has, by and large, been validated by events. When changes will have to be made, they may well lie beyond the author's present scope. Like virtually all Western observers of the former Soviet Union, Dannreuther has blinders that prevent him from looking eastward. To tell the truth, the author did briefly touch on China and its "unreconstructed imperial ambitions" but he failed to see the foreground, namely Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet, regions that constitute the eastern half of Central Asia. They may never become major external forces in the states under re-view here, but Mongolia and Xinjiang already have significant ties to some of these states, and thus one trusts that future discussions of the post-Soviet states at least mention the eastern portion of Central Asia.