

John Junkerman & Takei Masakazu (eds.), *POWER AND TERROR: Post-9/11 Talks and Interviews*, NOAM CHOMSKY. New York, Seven Stories Press, Tokyo, Little More, 2003, pp 1-157, ISBN no. 1-58322-590-0

As a collection of interviews and public talks given by Noam Chomsky in the aftermath of September 11th, this edited volume presents an undemanding and condensed introduction to some of his more general political thought. It ranks as probably the most candid and informal book on Chomsky to date. To those unfamiliar with his work, this current selection tangibly conveys the thinking and position of a public intellectual who remains an individual of great perseverance, integrity and conscience. Chomsky's unbending and consistently strident critique of much United States foreign policy confirms him as one of America's foremost contemporary critics. His insightful warnings about the possible deleterious consequences of what Chalmers Johnson describes as 'blowback', or the unforeseen, negative impacts of American foreign policy, remind us that Chomsky is also a critic who needs to be taken seriously.

"Power and Terror" can be seen as an extension of, and supplement to, the rushed and ill-conceived volume "9-11". As such, it's a more effective counterpoint to dominant mainstream analyses of current events than its predecessor. Compiled in New York and California during the spring of 2002, Chomsky's generalised comments adroitly confront a wide range of issues related to the themes of United States hegemony and terrorism. He positions terrorist attacks in the context of American foreign intervention throughout the post World War Two decades in Vietnam, Central America, the Middle East, and elsewhere. The book begins with one of the central tenets that Chomsky has promoted over the years - moral equivalence - the idea that the standards applied to other nations should also be applied to the United States. Throughout, he continually and uncompromisingly challenges the United States to apply to its own actions the moral standards it demands of others. At a time when the United States is bypassing the United Nations to instigate pre-emptive military actions and refusing to become a signatory to the International Criminal Court such a critical stance is especially important.

While this book is not as intellectually rigorous or demanding as some of Chomsky's earlier work, it does provide an accessible introduction and effective if simplified reiteration of some of his key ideas. For the lay reader, for whom this introduction is intended, Chomsky's trenchant analysis provides an important alternative political perspective to the dominant analyses that pervade the mainstream media and political discourse in the US and Australia. Although one may not always agree with his confrontational approach, he has an ability to highlight possible antecedents and catalysts of domestic and international conflict. Many of which are not only frequently ignored or neglected by much mainstream analysis, but may in actuality fuel the growing terrorist threat that preoccupies policymakers and the public alike. Finally, as this book confirms Chomsky is no mere Cassandra. The unerring optimism he has in the transformative potential of an informed citizenry is a welcome antidote to troubled times. At the very least, his arguments deserve to be heard and considered by as wide an audience as possible.

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