
lously recreate bygone styles, buildings that try to remain faithful to Modern Movement ideals, buildings that resemble Braun toasters, and buildings that look like they fell out of the sky and never quite got pieced together. Less may have been a bore, as Venturi claimed, but the replacement has turned out to be not so

much complexity and contradiction as confusion and anarchy.

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Midmorning in the New World Order

TEMPTATIONS OF A SUPERPOWER. By Ronald Steel. Harvard. 144 pp. \$18.95

WORLD ORDERS, OLD AND NEW. By Noam Chomsky. Columbia. 311 pp. \$24.95

History seems to allow no time-outs. With unnerving rapidity, the winning of the Cold War has already turned to ashes in the mouths of the "victors." The "New World Order"—that glad, confident morning—is now clouded over with doubts and fears more shapeless than those that darkened the days of superpower confrontations. The Cold War, it seems, was the good war. As well as stifling ethnic and religious conflicts worldwide, it gave the protagonists a clear sense of purpose. Yet obvious as it may seem, Americans have had trouble grasping the point made in both of these books: the Cold War was more an advantage than a menace to the United States.

Beyond making that point, however, these two books could hardly be more different. Ronald Steel, a professor of international relations at the University of Southern California, displays a cool, skeptical pragmatism as he discusses America's efforts to define its new world mission. Noam Chomsky, known almost as much for his anti-establishment political commentary as for his pioneering work in linguistics, practically bristles with outrage at the politicians, public, and—to him, most unacceptable of all—intellectuals who

have assented to America's foreign policy, both past and present.

Though he does not share Chomsky's indignation, Steel does wonder whether the United States can "find a way back from the Cold War." After all, in American political life the Cold War was, he writes, "our society's central focus" for three generations. America's all-consuming effort to contain communism revealed its underlying missionary character. (Revolutionary France, Steel points out, possessed a similar sense of unique destiny.) But this evangelical zeal aside, the Cold War occurred at a unique historical moment in the international power system, when America's reach was—or seemed to be—global.

Immediately after World War II, America arrived at a definition of national security that was practically without precedent. Throughout history, great powers have defined their security essentially in terms of neutralizing immediate military threats. But to the formulators of postwar U.S. policy, national security meant shoring up democracy wherever it was threatened in the free world. Here was, quite possibly, an historical first—traceable to what Steel unkindly calls the "loose rhetoric" of Woodrow Wilson—in which national security, the ideal of universal peace, and a liberal-democratic world order were all inextricably linked.

Chomsky has a word for this policy: "interventionist." Its key article was summed up in Winston Churchill's assertion that "the government of the world must be entrusted to the satisfied nations, who wished nothing more for themselves than what they had." Chomsky will not allow that Churchill's noble expression was ever anything more than a justification for the strong to oppress the weak. He never entertains even the theoretical possibility that a great-power system could be beneficial or provide a fruitful stability. To him, the concept of stability has been so perverted by the governments of the satisfied nations—preeminently by the United States—as to have blighted its value altogether.

Chomsky is alternately enraged and mystified by what he sees as the self-righteousness of mainstream America. His passionate defense of the weak against the strong crudely reverses the old realist maxim, *Might Is Right*. To him, the weak are never in the wrong, the strong always are. Up to a point, his constant reversal of mainstream assumptions is bracing. Beyond that point (which is reached quite soon), it is simply paralyzing. His relentless attack on American altruism also compels him to take a dim view of the future. The only way America can become good, in Chomsky's view, is by becoming weak. And even if the United States ceases to be a superpower, it will remain too strong for its own or anyone else's good.

Steel's prognosis is hardly so pessimistic. Yet if the problems of superpower status during the Cold War were great, he sees those of a lone superpower as being even greater. The value of Steel's work lies in his attempt to find reasonable guidelines, reasonable limits, for international action in the post-Cold War world. To assay those limits, he investigates the "shibboleths"—stability, leadership, and democracy—that recently guided American foreign policy. Those principles, uncritically followed, will, he believes, burden America with a limit-

less, impossible agenda in world affairs.

But such principles may prove useful in the future, Steel thinks, if they are rationally analyzed rather than, as in the past, waved as battle flags. Leadership, if it is not too jealous of its status, can be a good thing. Stability, like peace, is clearly a good thing unless manipulated to obstruct necessary change. America's great weakness in the past—and here Chomsky is surely right—was its reluctance to tolerate or accept as democratic anything it found disagreeable beyond its borders. This monopoly of definition, if it persists, is bound to foster endless problems.

Steel's concluding chapter is fittingly titled "What America *Can* Do." What America can do, what it should do—these are questions that many others besides Steel are asking. Was there a legitimate principle behind America's (and other nations') intervention in Iraq, and, if so, when and how should it be applied elsewhere? What role, if any, should America assume in Bosnia or Rwanda? "Do we have any obligations to these troubled lands?" Steel asks.

To begin to answer this large question, he lays down a couple of general principles: it is not America's responsibility to counter aggression everywhere in the world, but genocide should not be tolerated. Yet his gloss of this no-genocide rule shows the difficulty of translating even so basic an imperative into physical action. America should have intervened in Rwanda and Cambodia, he argues, but it is right not to do so in Bosnia because the genocide there takes place "in the context of a traditional war over territory." Such a distinction seems ready-made for confusion and deception. Likewise, by asserting there is "no unconditional right of self-determination," Steel leaves the problem of deciding under what conditions America should act as intractable as ever.

Steel's minimal prescriptions do not supply the United States much of an international agenda in the post-Cold War world. But then

he believes America does not need much in the way of a huge global agenda. Of the analyst at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D. C., who wants "to defend legal order at the far reaches of the globe" on the grounds that "massive breakdowns in the civil order are too dangerous for the entire [global] system," Steel scathingly remarks, "Perhaps this distinguished scholar has not noticed the 'massive breakdowns in the civil order' that have taken place a few blocks from his imposing office."

Steel minces no words when he says that America's overriding duty is to face up to its internal problems. After all, America's rivals today—the industrial megalith of Japan, the nimble trading states of Southeast Asia, the emerging colossus of China, the giant emporium of a uniting Europe—do not want to bury capitalism. To the contrary, they want to do it better than Americans do. "While we struggle with our role of superpower," Steel comments, "they concentrate on productivity, market penetration, wealth, and innovation: the kind of power that matters most in today's world. In this competition we are—with our chronic deficits, weak currency, massive borrowings, and immense debt—a very

strange kind of superpower."

Finally, what are Steel's hopes for this international order in which America so strangely operates as a superpower? His search for a viable future leads him ultimately not forward but backward, into the past. The phrases "concert of Europe" and "balance of power" have an archaic 19th-century ring to them, but Steele finds them the brightest beacons for the 21st century. The role of global policeman is dangerous, but that of traditional "great power," for all Chomsky's labeling of it as naked imperialism, is actually quite useful. If security interests can be redefined less extravagantly, as was done within the balance of power, and if groups of powers can cooperate regionally, as was achieved in the concert of Europe, there is a genuine prospect for a "new world order"—one, Steel believes, that will not be vitiated by ideological polarization. Oh come back, you satisfied nations Churchill spoke of, come back.

—Charles Townshend, a former Wilson Center Fellow and a historian at the University of Keele in England, is the author of *Making the Peace: Public Order and Public Security in Modern Britain* (1993).

OTHER TITLES

History

THE FORBIDDEN BESTSELLERS OF PRE-REVOLUTIONARY FRANCE. By Robert Darnton. Norton. 409 pp. \$27.50

Pornography exploits women—and men, children, and dogs. Such, at least, is the conventional wisdom today, and people who agree on little else, feminists and fundamentalists, right-wing conservatives and gay rights activ-

ists, can at least agree that pornography represents the worst and most reactionary forces of society. Yet, venturing into an 18th-century underworld of penurious hack writers, nervous publishers, and police-dodging peddlers, Princeton University historian Darnton has discovered a forbidden erotic literature that was, in fact, enlightened, philosophical, and progressive.

For two decades Darnton has been elaborating a thesis about the French Revolution