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Forum on Chomsky

INTRODUCTION

ERIC HERRING AND PIERS ROBINSON

This special section breaks an important silence in British international relations journals toward Noam Chomsky's political writings. Behind this silence lies the bigger matter of the silence in these journals about the issues contained in Chomsky's work. These issues include the use and sponsorship by the United States of terrorism on a massive scale for many years; the failure of most Western academics to take any interest in those US actions; and the dereliction by Western academics of their duty to help those who are trying to stop the United States from acting in this way. Once we started to read Chomsky's work, we concluded that there was a great deal to be learned from it. However, when we began to draw on it, we came up against widespread hostility towards his work combined with both ignorance and misrepresentation of precisely what he writes. In order to explore this undue marginalisation, we solicited a number of articles, including one from Chomsky, which resulted in this collection.

In our article we identify the puzzle that, whilst critical scholars share the same basic analytical framework as Chomsky on news media and public consent for US foreign policy, they fail to acknowledge his work. We argue that this is a product of an institutional tendency to filter out anti-elite perspectives. The consequences even for critical scholarship are near silence regarding the corporate nature of news media, principled opposition to US foreign policy and the function of academia in buttressing elite power. The challenge contained here for critical scholars is to reflect on and cease to carry out their often unwitting role in marking out the boundary of legitimate analysis.

The article by Doug Stokes provides evidence for Chomsky's view that there has been fundamental continuity in US foreign policy across the Cold War and post-Cold War eras which is based primarily upon exploitative North-South class relations. His work supports Chomsky's analysis that we are seeing in Colombia continuing counter-insurgent war against left-wing rebels and a continuing war of terror against civil society. In referring to a US war *of* terror, rather than *on* terror, Stokes' paper represents a perspective usually unthinkable in mainstream IR journals.

Mark Laffey's article shows that Chomsky makes a powerful case against the dominant IR disciplinary view that the Western world order is peaceful, benign and liberal (meaning that state power is constrained and human rights tend to be respected). Laffey also underscores the importance of Chomsky's political commitment to writing for ordinary people, rather than most scholars or policymakers, in

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order to assist them in defending themselves against the illusions generated by many of those scholars and policymakers.

The article by Chomsky himself provides a detailed discussion of the failure of mainstream academia both to take seriously empirical evidence regarding US terrorism in places such as Nicaragua and Cuba and to apply to US policy the ethical criteria that are applied to 'official enemies'.

Overall, the special section provides ample evidence to suggest that the marginalisation of Chomsky's contribution to the study of world politics is intellectually undeserved, though wholly 'deserved' for the power of its political challenge.

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