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FOREWORD

Noam Chomsky

It is a fascinating experience to view major events of the past half century through Eqbal Ahmad's discerning eye. His rendition of these events, and the tendencies in world affairs in which they find their proper place, benefits not only from his keen analytic faculties, broad knowledge, and many years of direct engagement but also from his ability, rarely even approached, to observe these developments from a perspective that integrates his deep immersion in the culture, history, and life experience of both North and South.

The conventional North-South metaphor brings to the fore what Ahmad regarded—rightly, I think—as the most fundamental divide of the post-World War II era, reflecting centuries of brutal conquest and oppression and later transmuted into new forms. From this perspective, enriched with the reservoirs of knowledge and insight from which he could draw, Ahmad was able to identify currents of modern history that few perceived. To mention only one distressingly timely illustration, he recognized at once that Washington and its allies were creating a terrorist monster when they exploited Afghan resistance to Soviet invasion by organizing and training Islamic fundamentalist extremists for their own cynical purposes. He warned that these initiatives were reviving a form of violent jihadism that had disappeared from the Muslim world centuries earlier and were also helping to implant similar forces in Pakistan under the brutal Zia ul-Haq dictatorship, with a devastating impact on Pakistani society, Afghanistan, and beyond.

Years later, still well ahead of his time, Ahmad recognized that “the United States has sowed in the Middle East and in South Asia very poisonous

seeds,” as Clinton bombed Afghanistan and Sudan in 1998. “These seeds are growing now,” he observed. “Some have ripened, and others are ripening. An examination of why they were sown, what has grown, and how they should be reaped is needed. Missiles won’t solve the problem.” As is now widely and belatedly understood, missiles not only did not solve the problem but actually greatly intensified it. Clinton’s bombing put al-Qaeda on the map, virtually created bin Laden as a charismatic leader and symbol of the new jihadism, forged close relations between him and the Taliban, and led to a sharp increase in recruitment, financing, and general sympathy and support for networks of the al-Qaeda variety. As is the norm, the conscious destruction of the major source of pharmaceutical supplies in the Sudan, leading to several tens of thousands of deaths (according to the few estimates from credible sources), scarcely raises an eyebrow among privileged circles in the West, let alone a twitter of protest. But the traditional victims tend to see the world rather differently. “Every use of force is another small victory for bin Laden,” Jason Burke writes in the most penetrating analysis of the “networks of networks” loosely termed al-Qaeda, reviewing Clinton’s contribution to their growth as well as later ones and reiterating Ahmad’s insistence that those who are seriously concerned with these forms of terror and their consequences must seek to understand and address the “myriad grievances,” many quite legitimate, that are “the root causes of modern Islamic militancy” (Burke, *Al-Qaeda*). The preferred approach, denial and violence, is a welcome gift to the jihadis, fertilizing these “very poisonous seeds.”

One consequence that Ahmad did not live to see, though it would probably not have surprised him, is the global struggle between two fundamentalist extremists, both assuring us that they have a direct line to the Lord of Hosts, the War God, who instructs them to drive evil from the world in the manner of ancient epics and children’s fairy tales, with loyal followers and awesome forces of destruction at their command and the world at their mercy.

From the same perspective, deeply rooted in both North and South, Ahmad was able to depart sharply from mainstream commentary, once again, and to predict with considerable accuracy the long-term continuities of policy that persisted after the Cold War came to an end. As he recognized immediately, the collapse of the Soviet Union was not likely to have a far-reaching impact on guiding policy choices of the world-dominant power, though tactical and rhetorical changes would take place in the light of new conditions: the return of the former Soviet Union to something like its traditional place

in the world system, reduction of the space for limited independence for the South, and virtual elimination of the deterrent to the resort to force by the superpower that, after World War II, “assumed, out of self-interest, responsibility for the welfare of the world capitalist system,” in the words of the senior historian of the CIA, diplomatic historian Gerald Haines.

Pursuing the matter in a way that I think is consistent with Ahmad’s worldview, we can usefully interpret the Cold War itself as in large measure a North-South conflict, which took on a quality of its own because of enormous differences of scale. Eastern Europe was the original “Third World,” diverging from the West even before the Columbian era, the West beginning to develop, the East becoming its service area. By the early twentieth century, much of the region was a quasi-colonial dependency of the West. The Bolshevik takeover in 1917 elicited much the same reactions as Third World liberation movements in later years. The new rulers of Russia sought to pursue a course of independent development that would extricate the society from the world capitalist system of which Britain and France were then the primary guardians. Furthermore, the Bolsheviks were perceived at once to be a “virus” that might “infect others” by providing a model they might seek to follow, to borrow the terminology of US planners once they had taken over “responsibility for the welfare of the world capitalist system.” Worse still, the virus was infecting even Britain and France, David Lloyd George and Woodrow Wilson lamented.

In the eyes of Western commentators, the 1918 Western invasion of the Soviet Union was therefore justified in defense against “the Revolution’s challenge . . . to the very survival of the capitalist order,” as the prominent Cold War historian John Lewis Gaddis describes the origins of the Cold War confrontation. The challenge is similar to what Adlai Stevenson later called “internal aggression” in the case of Vietnam, where internal events also threatened to open the way to a form of independent development that is an intolerable challenge in itself, even more so if it threatens to be a “virus” (the real content of the domino theory and the reason it has persisted from the 1940s, when it was first clearly formulated, even after the regular collapse of the versions fed to the public for disciplinary purposes). The challenge in 1918 consisted of internal reforms that others might seek to follow, justifying violence in self-defense, a refrain throughout the Cold War years, as Ahmad vividly records.

Other influential and highly regarded Western analysts also trace the origins of the Cold War to the Bolshevik takeover, invoking different grounds.

The leading post–World War II planner, George Kennan, was also a distinguished historian of Soviet–American relations. In his scholarly study of the topic, he writes that the Bolsheviks established the Cold War divide with “an element of finality” in January 1918. Hence the Western invasion immediately after was justified in reaction, along with everything that followed, including the paramilitary operations inside the USSR organized and directed by Kennan’s office in the State Department into the early 1950s. Kennan adopts the familiar stance for justifying the resort to force and violence—in fact, close to a historical universal—that Ahmad reviews for the post–World War II phase of the Cold War. Motives are always humanitarian, though sometimes benign intentions go astray because of innocence and naïveté or perhaps because of the evil nature of the target of benevolence. In Kennan’s view, what initiated the Cold War with an “element of finality” in January 1918 was Lenin’s dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, which “deeply shocked” Britain and particularly the idealistic Woodrow Wilson, who shared the “strong attachment to constitutionality” of the American public and was therefore unwilling to tolerate a government that had dismantled parliament and thus had no mandate beyond “the bayonets of the Red Guard.”

It will surprise no one who has learned the lessons that Eqbal Ahmad patiently taught for many years that the reaction was slightly different a few months later, when Wilson’s invading army dissolved Haiti’s National Assembly “by genuinely Marine Corps methods,” in the words of the Marine officer in command, Smedley Butler, who later offended right-thinking souls by exposing unacceptable truths about humanitarian intervention, which in this case killed thousands of peasants, reinstated virtual slavery, and after nineteen years of Marine occupation left the country in the grips of a brutal national guard and corrupt and vicious indigenous elites from which it has yet to escape and whose rule US intervention regularly fortifies. The Haitian parliament had lost any legitimacy when it refused Wilson’s orders to ratify a constitution that gave US investors the right to buy up Haiti’s land and turn the country into a virtual US plantation. Once a government was installed with no mandate beyond the “bayonets of the Marines,” the US–designed constitution was ratified by a 99.9 percent majority (with 5 percent of the population participating). There was thus nothing to offend the “strong attachment to constitutionality” of Wilson, Kennan, and others, no need to invade the United States to punish the crime, and certainly no need to contain the great power in charge, either then or after it had taken over global responsibility for

the welfare of the world capitalist system and acted in just the manner one would expect as it fulfilled that task.

It made good sense, then, to anticipate the continuities of policy that Ahmad predicted, accurately, as Russia returned to its proper place, poised precariously on the North-South divide.

Ahmad's life was not confined to study and the academy; far from it. He was directly engaged in popular struggle in both South and North, in both arenas facing considerable risk with equanimity and fortitude. The lesson he drew, and taught, for revolutionary struggle was clear and explicit: it is necessary to "outadminister the enemy" before fighting it. Revolutionary wars must be primarily political. In two prototypical examples, Algeria and Vietnam, the revolutionaries won "the war of ideas," outadministered the foreign invader, and in this way were able to counter its overwhelming military power. The same has been true in other North-South confrontations that were successful in that military power was overcome and a form of independence gained. But, as Ahmad described with painful and searing honesty, the victories commonly became defeats for the population, as corrupt and brutal elements gained power.

The process is very natural, in some ways almost inevitable, given the nature of North-South conflict. And though there are often internal factors that contribute to these consequences, the dynamics have deep roots in the very nature of this confrontation. The Indochina wars, the most murderous and long-lasting of the post-World War II era, illustrate a pattern that is quite general and the reasons for it. In their own terms, the aggressors, at least those more free from dogma and fanaticism, understand the truths that Ahmad discussed. In Vietnam, it was clearly recognized by both Vietnamese and Americans that the Vietnamese nationalist movement was relying on its dominant political power to resist US military power. The leading US government scholar of Vietnamese Communism, Douglas Pike, lamented that the National Liberation Front (Viet Cong) was the only "truly mass-based political party in South Vietnam," and the US client regimes could not consider entering into a coalition with it, "fearing that if they did the whale would swallow the minnow"; the enemy "maintained that its contest with the GVN and the United States should be fought out at the political level and that the use of massed military might was in itself illegitimate," until US massed military might forced it "to use counterforce to survive." This recognition was common among counterinsurgency specialists and scholars, though the propa-

ganda version for the public was different. The invading forces drew the logical conclusion: the society in which the resistance was based had to be demolished by military might. And it was. By 1967 prominent Vietnam specialist and military analyst Bernard Fall warned that “Viet-Nam as a cultural and historic entity” is “threatened with extinction,” while in the South, “the countryside literally dies under the blows of the largest military machine ever unleashed on an area of this size.” That was long before the mass murder operations of the post-Tet pacification campaigns.

In their own fashion, the ideological institutions perceive their own vicious savagery, though cloaking it in the standard virtuous garb. The editors of the *Washington Post* mused in 1992 over the “abiding irony that the United States lost the war in a military sense but ended up imposing a victor’s terms for normalization.” It was able to do so, they explained, “because it remained a country representing dominant global values, powerfully influencing the regional balance and the international economy. This is how all the concessions came to be made by Vietnam.” The editors could not have been unaware that the “global values” included brutal economic warfare from the first moment, backing for a Chinese invasion to punish Vietnam for driving the Khmer Rouge from Cambodia just as their atrocities were peaking, and then direct support for the Khmer Rouge and enhanced economic warfare while Washington exploited its control over the international economy to intimidate anyone, including allies, who might venture to break the stranglehold. When they began to do so anyway, and US business interests began to fear that they might lose out on potential profits, the “global values” allowed Washington to release its murderous grip enough for them to gain a piece of the action, but not without onerous conditions to ensure that the crime of victory by political means would not go unpunished and that others who might be tempted to take their fate into their own hands would be duly warned. No novelties here, and a closer look reveals further depths of cowardice and dishonor.

When political power confronts military might, it will almost inevitably be seriously damaged or destroyed in one or another way. Vietnam’s invasion of Cambodia, terminating Khmer Rouge terror, offered a convenient pretext, but there are always others. If military power is finally withdrawn from a ruined country, it is highly likely that only the more harsh, brutal, and corrupt will survive and take charge, constructive achievements and the popular forces behind them having been scattered or demolished. These predictable consequences of massive terror can be exploited by the aggressors as a pretext for

terror and economic warfare to punish those who have dared to liberate themselves and by elements of the educated classes to offer a retrospective justification for the atrocities and crimes they supported: just look at how awful the consequences were after we withdrew. The dual pattern of vengeful punishment and cynical retrospective justification is illustrated dramatically in the case of Vietnam and many others. And since history is written by the privileged and powerful, that is the picture that commonly prevails.

In short, there is a close relation between political-versus-military war and the profound disappointment that regularly follows. Whatever weight one gives to these factors, they can only be regarded as another shameful chapter in the chronicles of crimes of state and treachery of intellectuals.

Among Ahmad's most remarkable qualities were his resources of empathy and understanding, even in the face of horrifying atrocities. After Bengali nationalists killed or wounded thousands of his fellow Biharis in the 1971 uprising that led finally to the independence of Bangladesh—a revolt for which he had little sympathy—Ahmad courageously criticized the vicious reaction of the Pakistani army and responded to official condemnation with an eloquent open letter to a Pakistani diplomat, reprinted in this book, explaining the stand he took with the simple integrity characteristic of his life. Few analysts exposed more vividly the criminal atrocities of the US wars of aggression in Indochina, but Ahmad nonetheless qualified his critique. He preferred the term “maternalism” for American policy, he explained, with a grim analogy to a kind mother elephant who benignly crushes infant birds she has orphaned by crushing their mother. Such honesty and generosity are also rare qualities, and they suffuse his work, lending it a special layer of significance.

Ahmad was an inspiring figure, in his work and his life. There could hardly be a better model to try to follow, as best we can.

July 2004