

Altered States

**A READER
IN THE
NEW
WORLD
ORDER**

Edited by
Phyllis Bennis and
Michel Moushabeck
with an introduction
by Noam Chomsky



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Editors' Preface

Looking North: The New Challenge to the South

Michel Moushabeck and Phyllis Bennis

We stand at a defining hour. Halfway around the world, we are engaged in a great struggle . . . We know why we're there. We are Americans . . . What is at stake is more than one small country, it's a big idea — a new world order . . . Only the United States of America has had both the moral standing, and the means to back it up . . . The winds of change are with us now . . .

—George Bush, 1991 State of the Union Address

Throughout the Gulf crisis and the U.S.-allied invasion of Iraq in 1991 — one of the most wretched episodes in American imperial history — we heard a lot of talk about George Bush's vision of a "new world order." Having reduced southern Iraq to rubble, and having inflicted six-figure casualties on a people with whom he said "we" had no quarrel, George Bush felt uniquely qualified to lecture the American people on the values of democracy, though it was and remained unclear what was meant by the term, and where and for whom it should apply. (In Kuwait, the U.S. fought to restore autocracy; in Algeria, it hailed democracy's ruin; in Angola, it failed to support the outcome of democratic elections; in Somalia, it spent a decade propping up the anti-democratic regime of Mohammad Siad Barre; in Israel, it finances illegal settlement and occupation of the West Bank and Gaza by the Middle East's "only democracy"; in Haiti, it simply looked the other way.)

Clearly the war in the Persian/Arabian Gulf was not the noble cause that George Bush said it was. And all the talk about a new era of freedom and democracy, about decency and humanity, about prosperity, equality and social justice, about a new world order — amounts to one thing and only one thing: U.S. hegemony and dominance in what Bush called "the New American Century," because in it the U.S. is "the dominant force for good in the world." (In fact, that "dominant force" was born in the end of the Cold War and the collapse of Soviet influence in the Arab world, making it possible for the U.S. and its allies to launch a devastating war against Iraq.)

While the groundwork was laid from 1989, it was the year 1991 that marked the beginning of this new world order, and it was filled with the kind of moments when history stands still, moments that remain embedded in our individual and collective memory. Where were you, what were you doing, when you saw the first explosions over Baghdad's skies on CNN? When you first saw the enormous Russian flag carried through Moscow's streets in an image repeated for months in champagne and credit card commercials? When you first heard of the August coup? When you first saw Palestinian, Arab state and Israeli negotiators in Madrid sitting down to talk? When you first saw the red flag of the Soviet Union lowered for the last time over the Kremlin?

The changes shook the world, economically, politically, militarily, strategically. Alliances were made and broken, old enemies became new friends, and longtime allies were eyed with new suspicions. It was indeed the beginning of a new world order.

It was not, however, a very orderly new world. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War rendered obsolete the old global bipolar order. Over the past four decades, superpower contention acted as a stabilizing agent in some regions and in global spheres of influence, thereby producing the longest period of peace — *in Europe* — since World War II.

Suddenly, a volcano of change erupted with what Václav Havel called the "lava of post-communist surprises." The organization of the world into the nation-states decreed by colonial powers in the early twentieth century was rapidly deconstructing; it seemed the center could not hold. It was not that nationalism had faded from the global stage; quite the contrary, new nationalisms, new xenophobias, new chauvinisms sprouted like mushrooms after a rain. Nationalism, and its derivatives in racism and ethnic/religious hatreds, became dominant ideologies dividing pocket-sized populations from their neighbors, often within existing states. States began to crumble, and the new nationalisms emerged to challenge existing political institutions. As states fell, they divided into new "national" statelets, vying for economic and political survival in a newly-opened global playing field. As nations fell, micro-nationalisms rose to new heights.

In the wake of the Gulf War (the first test of the new world order and the U.S.'s role as unchallenged world policeman), the collapse of the Soviet Union (and with it its role as strategic contender with Washington), and the new weakness of the broader international community in the now unipolar world, it is certain that many things will never be the same again. Most of all, these new realities will impact the impoverished, underfed, over-indebted peoples of the South, the developing countries of the Third World. In the West, those images of the crumbling Cold War era had to do mostly with the Soviet Union and Europe — the fall of European socialism, the end of nuclear nightmares. But for much of the world, the emerging new world order was something very different: the triumphant West, and its former enemy, the defeated wannabe-West, joining to become the North — asserting economic and political domination over the poor and marginalized South, over Africa, the Middle East/West Asia, Latin America, Southeast Asia.

In the past, Washington used the Cold War to justify its longtime economic, political and military intervention in the Third World. Soviet strategic interest in blocking U.S. hegemony in the Third World matched the South's own interest in opposing Washington's interventions. In that context, Soviet assistance to the countries of the South was often instrumental in their uneven battles against U.S. and other Western control. But as the new order takes hold, the world is witnessing an intensification of the North-South conflict. The absence of the USSR as a strategic counterweight in diplomatic and military affairs, Russia's financial dependency on the West, and Western Europe's inability to challenge U.S. domination (a hopeful myth shattered by U.S. strongarm actions during the Gulf crisis) together create a dangerously lopsided unipolarity.

It carries with it a sobering message to the hungry and disempowered populations of the South, who are already paying a heavy price in political isolation and economic hardship. The U.S. is in a position to create and exploit more "villains," and to reward and protect more "friends," so long as they pay for such protection by following the policies chosen by Washington. (Quite apart from securing generous contracts and massive arms sales to its Gulf clients, the U.S. made quite a substantial profit after the various nations had paid their due towards the cost of Desert Storm. It remains to be seen whether Washington, ostensibly concerned about weapons proliferation in the Third World, is embarrassed about attaining its Number One Arms Dealer to the Third World position, with \$18.5 billion in military sales to those regions in 1990 alone.)

An important aspect of the new world order with a special impact on the South is the new role for the United Nations as a key tool of U.S. foreign policy. During the Gulf crisis, the UN, designed to preserve peace and security throughout the world, was transformed into an instrument of intervention and legitimization of war. Not only was the military action authorized by the UN (though carried out by Washington and its allies) an excessive response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, but it violated the UN Charter's own principle of exhausting all peaceful means before resorting to armed force. Further, the decision to use force was taken in an utterly discriminatory manner. If the same standards were used to enforce compliance of other binding UN resolutions by member states, Israel (who invaded and still occupies territories in Lebanon, Syria and Palestine), Indonesia (who invaded and occupied East Timor, killing nearly a third of the local population), the Serbs (whose savage slaughter of Bosnian civilians highlighted their campaign of ethnic cleansing), and of course the U.S. itself (who violated international law in its invasions of Panama and Grenada), would top the list of candidates for strong UN action. But the Security Council, structured to give its powerful Northern members veto power over the will of the majority of the nations of the world, made the application of such double standards not only possible but legal.

The same can be said about other UN agencies and multilateral institutions: the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), key vehicles in enforce-

ing the U.S.-dominated new economic order, are designed to reflect and strengthen the interests of the North — the transnational corporations, banks and investment companies capable of orchestrating the North-South economic divide. Their political/economic influence along this North-South faultline is directly proportional to the level of debt owed by the countries of the South. Writing in *The Nation* (March 29, 1993), Noam Chomsky noted “the U.S. International Trade Commission estimates that American companies stand to gain \$61 billion a year from the Third World if U.S. protectionist demands are satisfied at GATT (as they are in NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement), at a cost to the South that will dwarf the current huge flow of debt-service capital from South to North.”

In the struggle between North and South, the role of technology and mass communications are central. Advanced technologies, which might have led to a more informed world, instead have become ingenious tools of control by the North. The exclusive access to satellites and telecommunications guarantees that the overwhelming majority of world news is created and transmitted by the North to the developing countries of the South. Deprived of technology and their own channels of communication, the peoples of the South find it frustratingly difficult to get their voices heard abroad. Such imbalance resulting from the growth of the American (and, to a lesser degree, British) media's domination of international broadcasting means that the South continues to be limited to American news shaped by an American perspective. The “global village” has given way to the global CNN/BBC-ization of information.

Despite the end of the Cold War, there are no signs to encourage the belief that real peace is just around the corner. We still live in a world divided into nation-states defined, more or less, by national identities. But increasingly those identities are being reshaped, and the new passions they engender are creating the basis for long-term dissidence and conflict of a very different nature than in earlier periods.

The post-World War II years (before and during the Cold War) were the era of decolonization. Anti-colonial struggles, some of them genuinely revolutionary, were the defining events of the time. In many of those battles, the struggle against colonial domination (or in the later years, the slightly more subtle forms of neo-colonial control) was waged in concert with the fight for economic and social justice. The intersection of national rights and an end to economic exploitation by outside countries created a progressive rallying cry in the demand for national self-determination.

Today, in both the North and South, nationalism looks very different. It has re-emerged, not as a defense or standard bearer against colonial or colonial-style domination, but as a backward, inward-directed ethnic isolationism. In Somalia, for example, factional fighting within an unusually homogenous society in which virtually all Somalis share an ethnic and linguistic identity, brought much of the country to its knees. The ethnic power rivalry was waged among narrowly-distinct rival clans and sub-clans. And as a result, the capital and much of the rest of the country were brought to the brink of starvation and social collapse. Outside of the eyes of much of

the North, ethnic persecution is also underway in the Sudan, Liberia, Zaire, Cambodia, Rwanda and elsewhere.

But increasingly it is in Europe that the rivalries of ethnic/religious and nationalist hatreds are played out most viciously. The images of Bosnia, from the rape of Muslim women by Serbian thugs to the intensification of air and artillery attacks on Bosnian civilians as part of Serb and Croatian campaigns of "ethnic cleansing," have shocked the people of the industrialized North, unused to scenes of wanton destruction outside the Third World (at least since World War II). The destruction of the ancient historic city of Sarajevo by Serbian gunners on the hills ringing the town, has come to symbolize the brutality of ethnic conflict. It is not an accident that much of the most brutal nationalist strife has emerged in the formerly socialist countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The manifestations were suppressed during 40 years of socialism, but at least part of the post-Cold War nationalist fever seems to have arisen from state socialism's failure to change ideas. As well, the new economic pressures and social crises have created a political terrain ripe for scapegoating and nationalist demagoguery. Once the socialist lid was lifted, renewed ethnic and nationalist hatreds flourished in the newly open atmosphere.

Certainly this phenomenon is not limited to the new states built on the ruins of the Soviet Union and the formerly socialist countries of Eastern Europe. The anti-immigrant hysteria gripping France, Germany and even the traditionally more tolerant countries of Northern Europe, reflects the same reality. Attacks against "foreigners" (Turks, Arabs, Gypsies, Bulgarians, Romanians, etc.) and their homes by right-wing and neo-Nazi groups have become almost daily occurrences in Germany. Jean-Marie Le Pen's racist movement against Algerians, Moroccans and other "foreigners" in France, as well as similar movements across the continent, signal the ascendancy of the new definition of "nationalism."

That is not to say that no old-style nationalist movements remain within the countries of the South. One of the last truly anti-colonial nationalist movements, aimed directly against colonial occupation, is that of Palestine. Other examples include independence movements in Ethiopia and the Western Sahara aimed at the now-independent African governments of those countries. However, overwhelmingly they still reflect the legacies of colonial control by the North.

Since the end of World War II, there has not been a moment when so many people worldwide were desperately fleeing terror. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, over 18 million people across the globe are displaced in their own country or stateless refugees across borders. Contrary to the xenophobic complaints of Northern pundits, the vast majority of refugees fleeing countries of the South seek sanctuary in other Southern states — not in the far less accessible North. George Bush's dark vision of a "defining moment" does reflect (whatever his intention) these facts — facts that must be dealt with by his successor.

The Clinton administration came to power while much of the world is

hungry, poor, and vastly exploited; much of it is armed. In the industrialized North, the birthrates continue to decline; in the impoverished South populations skyrocket in the opposite direction. The gap between wealth and poverty that prevailed during the Cold War is widening to a chasm. Famine and communal war sweeping through regions of Africa no longer commanding superpower attention limned by the search for regional clients in the Cold War, continue to escalate.

With such a state of world affairs, the Clinton administration faces heightened anti-American resentment around the world, especially in the South, and increased suspicion of the new administration's universalist and humanitarian claims. So far, the Clinton White House has been unwilling to challenge the Cold War strategy of building and enhancing America's dominance in a — now — unipolar world.

Upon taking office Bill Clinton warned the South that "while the Soviet Union is gone, a president must still be ready to defy and to defeat those who threaten us . . . As we scale down our military, we must also keep up our guard." One hundred days into the new administration, Alexander Cockburn (*The Nation*, May 3, 1993) detailed its accomplishments so far: Clinton had "sold out the Haitian refugees; . . . let a Bush appointee, Herman Cohen, run Africa policy, essentially giving a green light to Savimbi in Angola to butcher thousands; put Israel's lobbyists in charge of Mideast policy; bolstered the arms industry with a budget in which projected spending for '93 is higher in constant dollars than average spending during the cold war from 1950; increased secret intelligence spending . . ."

And that was only the first 100 days.

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The idea of putting together this anthology emerged in early 1992, a few months after the publication of our earlier work, *Beyond the Storm: A Gulf Crisis Reader*. That book's widespread use and adoption as a text by more than 60 colleges and universities prompted us to take the debate a step further, by examining the broader notion of the new world order in the post-Cold War, post-Gulf War, post-Soviet world.

This collection, therefore, attempts to examine and make sense of that changing world — from the often ignored vantage point of the South. It functions as a history and analysis of the political, economic, and military relations being reshaped around the globe by a now strategically unchallenged U.S. Although a number of worthwhile studies on various aspects of the new world order are already in existence, what has been lacking, in our view, is a thorough evaluation of the effects of these global changes on the nations and peoples of the South. Hence, this effort to capture the breadth of issues involved, and offer the reader a glimpse of some of the major forces at work in the creation and projection of post-Cold War U.S. power abroad.

That is what this anthology is all about. Of course, it is by no means an exhaustive study of the subject. First, we wouldn't dare. Second, our main objectives are to encourage informed debate on a set of issues vital to world peace, to expose the ills and reality of the U.S. government's foreign policy

(which has been unusually prone to propaganda and double-speak), and to lead the reader to the point where she or he may want to seek further information.

It is important to mention at least some of the issues which, to our regret, are not covered in this book, primarily due to the constraints of space and deadlines. Those include the shifting balance of power among the Arab states, and the economic impact on the Third World of the decline of Soviet support. Regional conflicts we could not address include those in Afghanistan, Armenia-Azerbaijan, Angola, East Timor and Guatemala. Additionally, we did not include analyses of the impact of the new world order on the peoples of the global South here in the U.S. itself — chief among them disempowered communities of color, women, gays and lesbians, undocumented workers, the un- and under-employed.

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—Brooklyn
June 1993

Contents

Introduction: World Orders, Old and New <i>Noam Chomsky</i>	1
PART ONE ■ After the Gulf War	
1 Democratic Disguise: Post-Cold War Authoritarianism <i>Richard Falk</i>	17
2 Redefining Non-Alignment: The Global South in the New Global Equation <i>Clovis Maksoud</i>	28
3 Command and Control: Politics and Power in the Post-Cold War United Nations <i>Phyllis Bennis</i>	38
4 <i>Pax Americana</i> : U.S. Military Policy in the Post-Cold War Era <i>Michael T. Klare</i>	49
5 Contingency Plans: Nuclear Weapons After the Cold War <i>Michio Kaku</i>	60
6 Coming in From the Cold? The CIA After the Collapse of the Soviet Union <i>Marcus Raskin</i>	70
7 The "New Enemy"? Islam and Islamists After the Cold War <i>Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad</i>	83
8 Eco-Tiers: Rio and Environmentalism After the Cold War <i>Susanna Hecht and Alexander Cockburn</i>	95
PART TWO ■ The North-South Economic Divide	
9 Economic Apartheid in the New World Order <i>Arjun Makhijani</i>	107
10 The IMF and the World Bank in the New World Order <i>Robert S. Browne</i>	117
11 Economic Globalization: NAFTA and Its Consequences <i>Hilbourne A. Watson</i>	127

**PART THREE ■ The Transformation of Nationalism:
From Anti-Colonialism to Ethnic Cleansing**

- | | | |
|----|---|-----|
| 12 | The New Nationalism in Europe
<i>Mary Kaldor</i> | 141 |
| 13 | Uncivil Society: The Return of the European Right
<i>Paul Hockenos</i> | 153 |
| 14 | Closing Ranks: The North Locks Arms Against New Refugees
<i>Bill Frelick</i> | 162 |

PART FOUR ■ The Soviet Union and Russia

- | | | |
|----|--|-----|
| 15 | Defining Eras: The Collapse of the Soviet Union
<i>Fred Weir</i> | 175 |
| 16 | The Failed Soviet Coup: An Opening for Democracy, National
Independence and Fascism
<i>Leanne Grossman</i> | 186 |
| 17 | Left Behind: The Developing World in Russian Foreign Policy
<i>Tatiana Vorozheikina</i> | 196 |
| 18 | Re-Imagining Tajikistan: Exclusion in the Age of Nations
<i>Farhad Karim</i> | 205 |

PART FIVE ■ The Middle East

- | | | |
|----|---|-----|
| 19 | A Middle Eastern View of the New World Order
<i>Rami G. Khouri</i> | 217 |
| 20 | Dinosaur in the Tar Pit: The U.S. and the Middle East After
the Gulf War
<i>Joe Stork</i> | 227 |
| 21 | A Viable Partnership: Islam, Democracy and the Arab World
<i>As'ad AbuKhalil</i> | 239 |
| 22 | The Geopolitical Realities of Kurdistan vs. Hopes for a
New World Order
<i>Mehrdad Izady</i> | 246 |
| 23 | Why Palestine Should Stand Up for Itself
<i>Edward W. Said</i> | 259 |
| 24 | False Promises: The Madrid Peace Process
<i>Naseer H. Aruri</i> | 266 |
| 25 | Israel and the New World Order
<i>Mattiyahu Peled</i> | 278 |
| 26 | Concentric Circles: The U.S. and Israel After the Cold War
<i>Naseer H. Aruri</i> | 286 |
| 27 | Lebanon and the New World Order: Restoration of the
Old Lebanese Order
<i>As'ad AbuKhalil</i> | 292 |