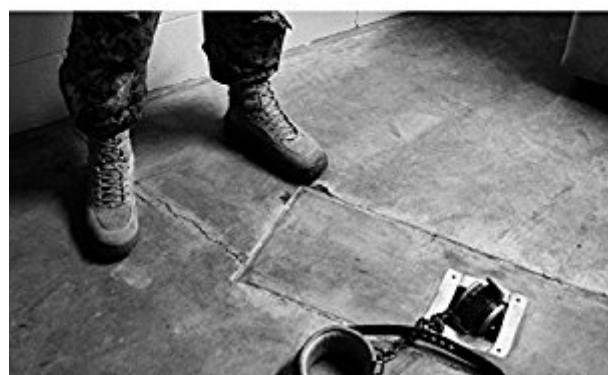


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# The Culture Of Terrorism

NOAM CHOMSKY  
CULTURE OF TERRORISM



## Synopsis

This scathing critique of US political culture is a brilliant analysis of the Iran-Contra scandal. Chomsky offers a message of hope, reminding us resistance is possible.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is Noam Chomsky's 1998 analysis of the Reagan administration's failed Central American policy that resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands as well as the destabilization of economies and governments in the name of the protection of the United States from a nonexistent enemy, global communism. Chomsky's reasoned analysis also shines the light on the complicity of the United States media in failing to report the truth behind America's illegal and immoral interference with democracy and human rights progressive, popular reforms of the dictatorships who serve our wealthy institutions. It is fascinating to learn how Reagan utilized the threat of terrorism to convince the American public to look the other way while he intervened illegally in the operations of other countries in the name of defense of our way of life that was supposedly threatened by the popular elections in Nicaragua. The same rhetoric now drives the Republican race for the presidency with racially blind hatred of Islam and Hispanics in the name of public and economic safety. See for example Ted Cruz' popular threat to carpet bomb ISIS in spite of the Geneva Convention and Marco Rubio's call for massive defense spending to save us from a foe without an airplane or a ship. The tried and true gambit of Reagan's prevarications is rising again seventeen years after Chomsky's excellent and prescient analysis.

While this might not be the best book to read if you've never before met this astounding intellect in print, it still serves to succinctly elucidate the most salient hallmarks of Chomsky's approach to world affairs and, more specifically, his country's foreign policy. These hallmarks include an incisive dissection of the subservience of intellectuals to state power, the flagrant hypocrisy of the US government, in this case the Reagan administration, as their public pronouncements project an image of inviolable nobility while their actions tell quite a different story, and the concentration of private power in a few hands which underpin, thus making possible, these disturbing aspects of American intellectual and political culture. The book began life as a "postscript" to a number of foreign editions of Chomsky's *Turning the Tide*, which dealt with many of the same points raised in this book, though *The Culture of Terrorism* deals with the Iran-Contra scandals at some length which the earlier text did not. Although the actual facts detailed in often exhausting rigorousness are well out of date, one is thoroughly exposed to the brazen dereliction of basic journalistic duty by those that Chomsky derisorily refers to throughout as representatives of the Free Press. They fall so effortlessly in line with state doctrine that the achievements, again noted by Chomsky, would make a totalitarian regime proud. That this happens in one of the freest countries in the world is nothing short of sickeningly scandalous. In case there are those that think Chomsky is a conspiracy nut or a devotee to the school of hyperbole he provides ample evidence which shows that even the so-called liberal press, namely the *New York Times* and the *New Republic*, are guilty of obscene apologetics for, and often advocates of, aggressive state terror. *The Culture of Terrorism* deals predominantly with the campaign of subversion and harsh repression conducted by the Contras in Nicaragua who were armed, trained, and constantly supplied throughout this terrible period by the US government. There were flights over the countryside on an almost daily basis and the examples of their weaponry cited in the book would put most armies in other third world countries to shame, let alone the guerrilla forces who were fighting in nearby El Salvador, a country Chomsky also sketches in much socio-political detail. In 1979 the Nicaraguans overthrew the brutal dictator Somoza, a member of a dynasty stretching back to the middle of the 1920s, whose reign ended with a "paroxysm of violence claiming the lives of 40-50000 people". This tiny Central American nation elected the leftist Sandinistas regime which immediately caused the big neighbour to the North considerable consternation. The Reagan Administration proceeded to destabilise this government by employing the Contras, many of them previously employed as members of Somoza's abysmally vicious National Guard, to raid innocent villages, destroy houses, steal livestock, and even kill Americans who had come to aid this miserably poor country that was improving dramatically under

the Sandinista regime. These leaps ahead in terms of health care, education and reduction of poverty were documented by such aid agencies as Oxfam at the time who compared the situation in this country with that of Guatemala and El Salvador. The picture created in the US media was quite different, however, as that charnel house Guatemala, along with El Salvador where political violence, including rapes, mutilation, tortures, and 'disappearances', were endemic, were described as "fledgling democracies". Conversely, Nicaragua under the Sandinistas was portrayed by the Free Press as a totalitarian state who was one of the tentacles of the Soviet Union. How interesting that by ordering an economic embargo of Nicaragua, and forcing allies to do the same, the Sandinistas are forced to turn to Russia for help which provides a retrospectively convenient basis for the Reagan Administration to scream from the roof tops that the Evil Empire is upon them. Also very intriguing, illuminated by copious quotations from leading journals and newspapers, that a country such as Guatemala, where it is estimated that around 150000 people may have been killed during the Reagan era, and El Salvador, the site of 50000 politically motivated murders during the same period, raise no impassioned denunciations of their odious socio-political conditions, or even an acknowledgement of these figures cited by human rights organizations and specialists of the region. Ignorance is indeed strength, as Chomsky notes in a very apposite evocation of Orwell, whom he often refers to throughout the book as the noted linguist creates for the reader a truly terrifying Orwellian world, all the more horrifying because it actually exists and is not only an acutely perspicacious exercise in allegory, where "democracy" implies regimes friendly to US business interests and "moderates" are people such as El Salvadoran president José Duarte who just happens to preside over a regime that assassinates Archbishops, union leaders, students, journalists of opposition newspapers, and just about anyone who dares to question the economically polarising policies of this staunch proponent of the US "development model", another term Orwell would be proud of as the development in question applies to rich folk while the poor become demonstrably poorer, as is still much the case today in our world of ever "freer" markets. The picture, as usual with Chomsky, is bleak, though when you have this much factual knowledge at your command, and have none of the necessary illusions required of the mendacious elites, then it is a tall task to be sanguine about world affairs, particularly those directed by the biggest terrorist state. The problem with reading a book published almost two decades ago about events that were then much publicized, is that much of the currency is unavoidably lost. At the very least the book provides an abundantly extensive historical overview of a time not all that different from our own, the primary deviation being the names of the victims and perpetrators, and at its most elevated altitudes of significant scholarship The Culture of Terrorism cogently demystifies the key

characteristics, established by the voluminous historical and documentary record, of the most influential institutions in US society. This has always been Chomsky's greatest gift and this book amply, though not definitively, showcases his remarkable ability to not only render events in breathtakingly astounding detail, but always ensures that they are related to a wider context of previous incidents and current practices. This is not a book for those individuals who still foster illusions that the United States is the most benevolent super power the world has ever known. For those willing to look beyond the purposely constrained bounds of the mainstream media, as well as the limits of their own often self-willed ignorance, the book provides ample insights into past practices and their very grave implications for future conduct by the globe's sole remaining hegemonic force. Chomsky may be less a voice in the wilderness than he was when the book was published, but still not enough people are hearing his extremely vital message.

It has become impossible to write a review of a Chomsky piece without focusing a large content of the review on Chomsky himself (witness ... slew of one-star versus five-star reviews of all his books, which often feature personal opinion rather than genuine, responsible argument). Being something of a free-thinker with an interest in politics and psychology, I've understandably been drawn toward the debate surrounding Chomsky and his stunning claims about the nature of Western (usually US) policy -- and have been very disappointed with the childish nature of that debate, as it has declined hopelessly toward name-calling and a ridiculous skewing of facts and quotes. How does a person know who to believe? (I should reiterate that it really has become a case of "who", not "what", as if the merit of an argument has anything to do with its author.) With that state of mind I decided that the best way to get a handle on these astonishing claims about Western policy would be to actually read a book by its most prominent critic. Deciding which book to read wasn't a problem, since, of the two bookstores and one library in my area, an obscure 1980's text called "The Culture of Terrorism" was the only of Chomsky's publications that I could find. The first two chapters, in introducing the main thesis -- that, unlike the US government's claim to "further the cause of democracy" worldwide, the US's policy is actually to maintain control of as much of the Third World as possible via manipulation of its governmental systems -- assume a familiarity with the Iran-Contra dealings and the US invasion of Nicaragua, and, since I was rather ignorant of these matters, at first the book only served to alienate me. But from Chapter 3 onward, the book is a focused exercise in intense -- and superior -- fact-finding, very effectively discrediting the popular, US media-supported claims that America was doing Nicaragua a favor by funding a guerrilla movement to destroy its government and replace it with a more America-friendly one. The book argues that the Sandinistas, far from

being a perfect government, were certainly a step in the right (or, rather, left) direction for Central America -- making Nicaragua an intolerable ideological exception to the US's (unstated) insistence that the world remain effectively owned by businesses and the upper-class, at the terrible expense of poor people's rights and living conditions. Chomsky provides a thorough and shocking contrast of American media reports of the Central America situation (with even the "respected" media -- e.g. the New York Times, Washington Post, etc. -- acting as a virtual mouthpiece for US government propaganda) and the disinterested overseas media and human rights groups that reported much more objectively and responsibly on the same incidents. Half the book is about the reality of the US invasions of Nicaragua, while the other half is about how horrendously the submissive domestic media was able to butcher the facts. I found both parts of the book to be extremely well-researched and persuasive -- not to mention surprisingly hilarious in parts (nobody writes with more humor about state-sponsored terrorism than Noam Chomsky). Being born in America, and having grown to be very critical and cynical of it, I'm certainly susceptible to the idea -- as forwarded by most of Chomsky's critics -- that a major reason for his appeal is not because he is a great historian, but that he provides endless fodder for anti-American views. In other words, for people who call themselves "free thinkers" (as I did above), it becomes tempting to cling to the opinions of like-minded souls, regardless of the fact that their arguments may lack merit. I will allow that, to a certain extent, this phenomenon does apply to me. However, having finished "The Culture of Terrorism", I returned to the same old websites featuring the same slew of Chomsky-bashing, and tried to find coherent arguments to the effect that Chomsky's analysis of the US invasion of Nicaragua was anything but dead-on. I could find nothing. For this reason, I should stress that I wholeheartedly enjoyed "The Culture of Terrorism", I think its conclusions are extremely well-supported, and I have every reason to believe it is a landmark piece of nonfiction. As for other books by Noam Chomsky -- I haven't read them yet, so I'd feel ludicrous if I were to join all the cheering Chomskyheads in claiming that he can do no wrong. I apologize for writing a review that was probably too lengthy, but unfortunately I felt it necessary to emphasize that my complete, unreserved endorsement for this excellent book was actually a recommendation for the book's argument, not its author. This is a phenomenal study of US domestic and international policies regarding its dealings with Central America in the 1980's -- simple as that.

Simply put, Chomsky is an unparalleled analysis of foreign policy. In any one of his books, there are gems - one of many from this book was how he presaged the controversy of the CIA being complicit in funding the Contra War in Nicaragua by importing cocaine into California. In my humble opinion,

any book by Chomsky is a must-read!

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