

Book Notes: Failed States: the Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy, by Noam Chomsky

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BOOK NOTES

FAILED STATES: THE ABUSE OF POWER AND THE ASSAULT ON DEMOCRACY, BY NOAM CHOMSKY. NEW YORK, NY: METROPOLITAN BOOKS, 2006. Pp. 311. Notes, index. \$32.00 cloth (\$18.95 paper, April 2007).

BY SARAH L. BOYD

Failed States is a virtual sequel to *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest For Global Dominance* (New York NY: Metropolitan Books, 2003). Chomsky continually refers to *Hegemony* and other sources; familiarity with international law and politics is necessary to avoid being bowled over by Chomsky's rapid-fire style. *Failed States* leaves no issue untouched, connecting disparate events like the death of Terry Schiavo, the NATO bombing of Kosovo, and international attitudes to Al-Jazeera.

In his definition of “failed states,” and in his argument that the United States has become one, Chomsky deals with six interconnected areas. He reviews American imperialism, for which he finds roots as far back as independence; Chomsky argues that American foreign policy has always protected American economic interests, and that any stated intentions of development or justice were merely chimera.

Chomsky then turns to a more detailed examination of recent examples, including the “War On Terror” and the occupation of Iraq. Disdainful of American exceptionalism, he disparages the actions of the “Coalition of the Willing” and the media portrayal of the war. Allies such as the United Kingdom and Israel rate scathing asides. Chomsky also targets the hypocrisy of disregarding the limitations on the use of force set out in international law in order to fulfill imperial desires.

Particular scorn is reserved for the supposedly altruistic aim of “democracy promotion abroad,” which Chomsky paints as a transparent smokescreen for increasing American hegemony. Finally, he analyses domestic politics, citing many issues—including the lack of accessible and affordable healthcare in the United States—as evidence for his contention that it is a “failed state,” and as such is utterly unqualified to promote democracy anywhere else.