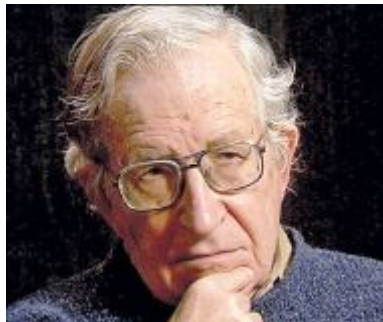


Chomsky's Unearned Prestige

by Eric Zuesse via jane - SCF Sunday, Jan 6 2019, 7:35pm

international / prose / post

A large part of Noam Chomsky's public image as an intellectual is derived not from his role in the field of linguistics, but instead from his having co-authored with Edward Herman *Manufacturing Consent*. The first matter to be discussed here will therefore be Chomsky's contribution to that work; and, more broadly, that work's contribution to human understanding — the actual significance of the book.



Noam Chomsky

Chomsky's contribution to that 1988 book was to describe the selling of specifically the wars in Vietnam and in adjoining Indochinese nations, according to that book's main author, Herman's, theory. That theory was called the "[Propaganda model of communication](#)". It's the book's theory, or "model," of manufacturing consent for wars. According to their book, the practitioners of this model are the public relations or PR profession that sell, to the domestic American public, invasions and military occupations of foreign lands. This is a specialized field of PR.

Herman's theory (or "model") of political PR (commonly called "propaganda") for the invasion and control of foreign countries, had, itself, actually already been presented 66 years earlier in almost full form in Walter Lippmann's 1922 introduction of that concept, "the manufacture of consent," but Lippmann focused there more broadly, on the selling of all types of governmental policies, and not only on the selling of invasions and military occupations of foreign lands. Lippmann had introduced this broader concept of "the manufacture of consent," in his 1922 book [Public Opinion](#).

Chomsky's theoretical contribution to the concept — that is, to the theory (manufacture of consent) — was nil, and even Herman's additions to Lippmann's theory (Herman's model of it, that is, for selling wars) were only minor, and certainly not as deep as Lippmann's broader theory is. Lippmann's analysis of the subject was the foundation of Herman's "Propaganda Model." Herman's "model" of Lippmann's theory was merely the application of "the manufacture of consent" to specifically the selling of foreign invasions and military occupations.

In any case, as Edward Herman's biographer said, "Ed was the primary author. Ed developed the Propaganda Model and wrote the chapters before the Indochina wars, and Noam wrote the Indochina chapters." This would mean that Chomsky wrote pages 169-296 (127 pages) of the 330-page work. He applied there Herman's model, to analysis of the media-coverage of the wars in three countries: Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.

Chomsky was the co-author who also gave the public speeches and most of the interviews on the book, because he was its famous author. Chomsky was therefore constantly generating new sales and income for both of the authors. He was the book's main salesman. And this was Chomsky's main contribution, outside of linguistics. Of course, his speeches and interviews about mainly-Herman's book also helped considerably to increase Chomsky's fame beyond his narrow technical field of linguistics.

Chomsky's chief non-linguistic contribution to the world has thus been his marketing Herman's model of the sales-promotions (the propaganda) for wars; and that model, in turn, was based upon Lippmann's theory of the manufacture of consent. Here is how he marketed it:

In a 2002 interview, Chomsky said:

The term "manufacturing consent" is not mine, I took it from Walter Lippmann, the leading public intellectual and leading media figure of the twentieth century, who thought it was a great idea. He said we should manufacture consent, that's the way democracies should work. There should be a small group of powerful people, and the rest of the population should be spectators, and you should force them to consent by controlling, regimenting their minds.

That's not true. Lippmann instead had said the manufacture of consent happens, and throughout history has happened, in each and every nation, of every type. He didn't say it "should" happen, but that it always does happen. He said a very different thing than what Chomsky said that Lippmann had said. What Lippmann had said is also far less heinous than Chomsky's smear of Lippmann made it appear to be. It wasn't heinous at all.

Here is the key part of Lippmann's actual presentation on the matter:

That the manufacture of consent is capable of great refinements no one, I think, denies. The process by which public opinions arise is certainly no less intricate than it has appeared in these pages, and the opportunities for manipulation open to anyone who understands the process are plain enough.

The creation of consent is not a new art. It is a very old one which was supposed to have died out with the appearance of democracy. But it has not died out. It has, in fact, improved enormously in technic, because it is now based on analysis rather than on rule of thumb. And so, as a result of psychological research, coupled with the modern means of communication, the practice of democracy has turned a corner. A revolution is taking place, infinitely more significant than any shifting of economic power.

Within the life of the generation now in control of affairs, persuasion has become a self-conscious art and a regular organ of popular government. None of us begins to understand the consequences, but it is no daring prophecy to say that the knowledge of how to create consent will alter every political calculation and modify every political premise. Under the impact of propaganda, not necessarily in the sinister meaning of the word alone, the old constants of our thinking have become variables. It is no longer possible, for example, to believe in the original dogma of democracy; that the knowledge needed for the management of human affairs comes up spontaneously from the human heart. Where we act on that theory we expose ourselves to self-deception, and to forms of persuasion that we cannot verify.

Nowhere in all of Lippmann's published writings did he ever say anything like:

We should manufacture consent, that's the way democracies should work. There should be a small group of powerful people, and the rest of the population should be spectators, and you should force them to consent by controlling, regimenting their minds.

Elsewhere, Chomsky asserted, which likewise was misrepresenting Lippmann's views:

He [Lippmann] said this is useful and necessary because the common interests, the concerns of all people, elude the public. The public isn't up to dealing with them, and they ["the concerns of all people"] have to be the domain of what he called a specialized class.

Notice that that's the opposite of the standard view about democracy. There's a version of this expressed by the very respected moralist and theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. ... His view was that rationality belongs to the cool observer, but because of the stupidity of the average man ..., "necessary illusions" [are needed]. ...

It's not the case as the naive might think, that indoctrination is inconsistent with democracy, rather as this whole line of thinker observes, it's the essence of democracy.

Lippmann's view was instead that it's not "the essence of" any type of government, but that it is an unfortunate part of every type of government. Instead of being portrayed as "the essence of democracy," it was portrayed as something that's in every sort of government.

The closest that Lippmann had said, to Chomsky's version of it, was:

In the absence of institutions and education by which the environment is so successfully reported that the realities of public life stand out sharply against self-centered opinion, the common interests very largely elude public opinion entirely, and can be managed only by a specialized class whose personal interests reach beyond the locality. This class is irresponsible, for it acts upon information that is not common property.

Lippmann there essentially defined what he had otherwise called "the sinister meaning of the word [propaganda]" as being the "irresponsible" type of it. Lippmann was not saying that this is what should be — much less that it's the way any country ought to function. He was even, on the contrary, warning against it. Lippmann went on to say "The democratic theory by failing to admit that self-centered opinions are not sufficient to procure good government, is involved in perpetual conflict between theory and practice." His warning was prophetically important. He was pointing out the difference between the way things are (lacking some democratic regulations — democratic governance — that are needed in order to serve and protect individuals), and the way things must become, if the future isn't to go the wrong way (as it has done, and still is doing). In any "non-sinister meaning" of the word "propaganda," "the environment is so successfully reported [by practitioners of the propaganda professions] that the realities of public life stand out sharply against self-centered opinion." Only to the extent that PR is entirely truthful, informing the public in such a way that "the realities of public life stand out sharply against self-centered opinion" and not at all deceiving or misleading people, can it even possibly avoid being "sinister." And whenever it is "sinister," it is "irresponsible." He was clear. Lippmann was (especially as seen now, in historical retrospect) both true and wise. The misrepresentation of him by Chomsky presents Lippmann instead as having been sinister.

Misrepresentations such as those described above, are common in Chomsky's public statements. In

the above examples, the topic happened to be one (“Manufacturing Consent”) regarding which Chomsky had gained a significant portion of his fame as being a supposed expert and authority. He supposedly understood this subject, and was supposedly an expert speaker about it, who wouldn’t distort and lie about the matter, such as he routinely does. (The examples cited here are not anomalous, they are typical.)

In 2005, the trade-newspaper for college and university professors, the Chronicle of Higher Education, headlined “Chomsky as the world's top public intellectual”. It reported that in the first-ever poll taken by Britain’s Prospect magazine, Chomsky “has been voted the world's leading public intellectual from a list of 100 prominent thinkers compiled by the British magazine.” Prospect also “holds the annual Think Tank Awards, which celebrate and reward the work of think tanks on a national and global scale. The awards are supported by Shell” and by other international corporations. Each one of them has a PR department, lobbyists, and other members of what Chomsky said that Lippmann had said was the “specialized class” “that's the way democracies should work,” “because the common interests, the concerns of all people, elude the public. The public isn’t up to dealing with them.” Perhaps academics, and the owners of international corporations, want the public to think that that’s the way things are — that the aristocracy (who control the corporations and endow the colleges, etc.) aren’t the cause and source and boss of the propaganda-business, and that instead the public’s own stupidity and gullibility are the cause and source of that business. That’s blame-the-victim thinking. However, that view of the matter came actually from Chomsky, not at all from Lippmann. So, perhaps people who are gullible enough to be reading magazines such as Prospect, or the Chronicle, believe Chomsky is a wise man, but people who understand the propaganda-business, know better. They hire and promote organizations such as Prospect magazine and individuals such as Chomsky, to “force them [the public] to consent by controlling, regimenting their minds” (via such PR agencies and professors) so as to blame the public, instead of to blame the people who actually hire the people who manipulate the public: the aristocracy. How exquisite a deception is this? Is Chomsky really so skilled an example of this “specialized class,” of persons who possess “that rationality,” which “belongs to the cool observer,” and not to “the naive” masses? Perhaps Chomsky has deceived himself to think so. Obviously, his many admirers think so and view him as being a paradigm of these ‘truths’ — but they’re lies. Chomsky’s ‘paraphrases’ of Lippmann are not statements of Lippmann’s actually expressed views, which are, if anything, the exact opposite. Chomsky’s statements about the person who was actually the originator of the concept of the manufacture of consent were a fraudulent caricature of Lippmann, as if Chomsky had greatly improved upon Lippmann’s original presentation of the “manufacture of consent.” Consequently, Chomsky misrepresented both the person, and that person’s concept and intention.

There are many, many, other examples of Chomsky’s deceptions. For one, his championing of America’s invasion of Syria is, itself, terrific propaganda for the manufacturers of US weapons such as Lockheed Martin, and for America’s and its allies’ international oil and gas giants, and it’s propaganda for criminal US invasions and military occupations of sovereign foreign lands. Until recently, America’s invasion and occupation of Syria were relying mainly upon the Syrian branch of Al Qaeda to train and lead ‘our moderate rebels’ there to overthrow and replace Syria’s Government by one that would be selected by the Saud family who own Saudi Arabia and are the key foreign ally of America’s aristocracy — the Sauds are the people who, by selling their oil only in dollars, prop up the value of the US dollar no matter how big the US Government’s debts are and trade-deficits are. But more recently, the US military has been relying instead upon Syria’s separatist Kurds to take over in northeast Syria. Either way, it’s America’s invasion and occupation of the sovereign nation of Syria — an extreme violation of a nation’s sovereignty over its own territory. However, Chomsky and many other leading scholars and intellectuals (and war-industry-funded think-tanksters) encourage this international aggression by the US Government. Here’s a specific example of that, from

Chomsky:

On 23 April 2018 was published in the New York Review of Books, "A Call to Defend Rojava: An Open Letter". Chomsky was one of its signers. His name there added prestige and 'authority' to the proposal. Rojava is the projected name for a breakaway Kurdish region to be taken from the existing nation of Syria, by the US and its anti-Syrian allies, and to be ruled then by the US-established "Syrian Democratic Forces" (SDF) of the most-ethnocentric Kurds. That "Open Letter" was urging continued US military arming and training of Kurdish fighters, the SDF, to achieve this goal of a Kurdistan for Kurds, which would be like the existing Israel for Jews — that is, everyone else in the given territory would be second-class citizens; they'd be ruled by Kurds there, like in Israel by Jews. Rojava would be an apartheid state, like Judaic Israel is, and White South Africa was. This letter, signed by Chomsky, demanded that the US "continue military support for the SDF," and the letter asserted that "the Kurdish-led forces had established an oasis, unique in Syria, of local self-government, women's rights, and secular rule." That's false. Secular rule and women's rights wouldn't be "unique in Syria," but instead the same as under Syria's present Government. The two links in that demand within the letter, are links that are in the letter itself, and both links are to articles that were written by neoconservatives — proponents of American conquest of foreign lands. Syria's Government already provides, and has long-established (not only in its customs but in its laws), both women's rights and secular rule. However, a Western (US-allied, in this case Jordanian) poll of Syrian women found that four fifths of women said that "the social norms in Syria truly impede women's success." The same percentage might be found in Kurdish areas of Syria. The "social norms" in Syria were not established by the Government but by tribal and religious traditions that go back for centuries, and even for millennia. Syria's Constitution, however, asserts that "The state shall provide women with all opportunities enabling them to effectively and fully contribute to the political, economic, social and cultural life, and the state shall work on removing the restrictions that prevent their development and participation in building society." It also says: "Citizens shall be equal in rights and duties without discrimination among them on grounds of sex, origin, language, religion or creed." Although some Syrians (including some Kurdish ones) want Islamic (Sharia) law, and most of the fighters who have been backed by the US Government to overthrow Syria's Government are of that religious type (jihadists — fighters based on religious reasons and favoring religion-based laws), Syria is the most secular of all Arabic countries; and even the polling in Syria by Western polling organizations has shown consistently that the secular Bashar al-Assad would easily win any free and fair election there.

Furthermore, Table 26 of the July 2015 Orb International poll of Syrians asked Syrians for "the reason that explains the presence of ISIL?" ("ISIL" is synonymous with ISIS and Daesh.) And 82% of Syrians said "ISIL is US foreign manufacture." That was the highest percentage for any explanation. In Table 20, the other options were also shown, and the closest ones were 59% for "widespread sectarian politics in the Arab countries and in Turkey," and then 55% for "ISIL is some Arab regimes manufacture" — presumably referring in that case to the Saudis, especially since Turkey wasn't included in that particular option (it's not Arab) and yet 55% is nearly as high as the 59% (which did include Turkey — along with "the Arab countries" — as being a cause for ISIL's being in Syria). So, Syrians apparently know the truth about that matter, even if Americans (such as Chomsky) don't. The US Government is the main source of their war, and "sectarian politics in the Arab countries and in Turkey" also contributed to it. In other words: the US Government has taken advantage of those local "sectarian politics" in order to conquer Syria. The US is even more unpopular among Syrians than is the Saud family, and this is the reason why the US Government was trying to get the Saudis to run Syria. The US Government has a bad reputation in almost every Muslim-majority land, but especially in Syria and in Iran (neither of which that US Pew poll even sampled), both of which the US Government hopes to conquer.

In a 26 September 2018 interview with *The Intercept*, Chomsky said of “the Kurdish areas — Rojava” that “They have the one part of Syria which is succeeded in sustaining a functioning society with many decent elements. And the idea that they should be subjected to an attack by their bitter enemies the Turks, or by the murderous Assad regime I think anything should be done to try to prevent that.” Chomsky there certainly disrespects Syrian national sovereignty, and despises the non-sectarian President of that country, who shares the view (which repeated polling in Syria has shown to be the view of the vast majority of Syrians), that Syria is and must remain a secular and multi-ethnic country. The goal of breaking Syria up into ethnic enclaves has circulated ever since at least the 1950s within the CIA, RAND Corporation, and Israel. However, Obama’s goal was instead to have the royal Saud family control Syria. But that plan had already failed even before Trump became the US President.

As to the reality regarding the Kurds versus the Government, it’s tragic. Bashar al-Assad and Syria’s highly secular ruling Baath Party (which existed long before the Assad family rose to its leadership) have faced only bad options there. Propagandists of the sinister type (such as Chomsky) take advantage of that fact. The northwest Syrian city of Afrin is the best example of this reality. On 7 June 2018, Britain’s pro-US-empire (or “neoconservative”) *Guardian* newspaper headlined “‘Nothing is ours anymore’: Kurds forced out of Afrin after Turkish assault: Many who fled the violence January say their homes have been given to Arabs”. The article was true, except that it ignored the key fact, that the Arabs whom Syria’s Government had transferred into the Kurdish-rebel-run city of Afrin and who now were taking it over, were jihadists who had been defeated by the Government, around the city of Ghouta, and the Government chose to offer those jihadists this relocation to Afrin in preference to the Government’s killing everyone in the pro-Sharia-law enclaves around Ghouta simply in order to destroy those jihadists there. (Syria’s Government wanted to minimize civilian casualties, and so offered jihadists this alternative, which would free non-combatant Ghoutans from their captors instead of killing them, but there was this inevitable down-side to doing that.) So, the Government was now letting the fundamentalist-Sunnis who rejected Syria’s Government, fight in Afrin against the tribalist Kurds there who controlled that area and rejected Syria’s Government. Unfortunately, tragically, the non-tribalist Kurds likewise became dispossessed there. Wikipedia has a brief but broadly accurate description of the background of this tragedy.

Propagandists take advantage of such tragedies, in order to deceive the public. Chomsky, a co-author of *Manufacturing Consent*, is an example of that — in this case manufacturing consent for US imperialism. What he has been saying about Syria is propagandizing for America’s invasion and occupation of that country. The means by which this immensely destructive invasion and occupation are done are not merely US troops training and arming the fighters, but are especially the fighters themselves, first mainly jihadists, but more recently and increasingly ethnocentric Kurds. The results of this ‘civil war’ have been horrific. “Gallup measured negative emotions in 138 countries in 2013 by asking people whether they experienced a lot of stress, sadness, anger, physical pain, and worry the previous day, ... [and found that Syria] is the only country in the world whose Negative Experience Index score exceeds its Positive Experience Index score.” Iraq was found to be almost as bad — still, even ten years after the US regime’s destruction of that country, in 2003, by an invasion based on lies.

An extraordinary journalist at a mainstream ‘news’-medium, William Arkin, quit NBC and MSNBC on January 2nd, and the star columnist at the online site that’s called “Medium,” Caitlin Johnstone, headlined then “Reporter Quits NBC Citing Network’s Support For Endless War”. She linked to Arkin’s email resigning from those networks. It had mentioned such unmentionables as “I’m alarmed at how quick NBC is to mechanically argue ... in favor of policies that just spell more conflict and more war. Really? We shouldn’t get out Syria?” But it’s not only the directly mega-corporate ‘news’-media that shape the ‘news’ this way. Johnstone aptly noted:

A journalist with NBC has resigned from the network with a statement which highlights the immense resistance that ostensibly liberal mass media outlets have to antiwar narratives, skepticism of US military agendas, and any movement in the opposite direction of [from] endless military expansionism. ... Another way to say it would be that plutocrat-controlled and government-enmeshed media networks hire reporters to protect the warmongering oligarchic status quo upon which media-controlling plutocrats have built their respective kingdoms, and foster an environment which elevates those who promote establishment-friendly narratives while marginalizing and pressuring anyone who doesn't.

The enormous success of that manufacturing of consent for our nation's military, has been proven conclusively, by Gallup's constant polling of Americans on our degrees of respect, or disrespect, for the nation's various institutions. Each and every year, the one institution that Americans respect by far the most is the military. The American institution that's the worst of all (an engine of misery even within the United States), is also the most respected of all. That's how enormously successful the manufacturing of consent is, in America. Can such a country be a democracy at all, or only a dictatorship? Does it resemble 1984's "Big Brother," and perpetual war for perpetual 'peace'?

On 18 March 2011, a blogger at Huffington Post, David A. Love, headlined "A State of Perpetual War", and opened:

In the George Orwell classic 1984, there is a state of perpetual war between the nations of Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia. The enemy in the conflict is ambiguous, and the battlefield exists in an elusive and distant land. The enemy could be Eurasia one day, and Eastasia the next, but that location is really insignificant. ... Before, it was the Cold War, and now it is the War on Terror. And the boogeyman du jour is Al Qaeda and Islamic terrorism rather than Communism. And it doesn't seem to matter whether the government is controlled by Democrats or Republicans.

And now, the 'enemies' are, yet again, Russia, and China, and North Korea, and Iran — but always anything, in order to keep the tax-money flowing to firms like Lockheed Martin, in order to provide the muscle, for firms like ExxonMobil, to be able to extract resources more profitably, from around the world.

What Chomsky is doing is in accord with the theory for selling foreign invasions and military occupations, as was set forth in his co-authored 1988 book. Chomsky has been practicing what he has become famous for condemning. (Instead of training and arming Vietnamese and other fighters, the US now is training and arming jihadist and ethnocentric fighters, such as ones led by Al Qaeda and by separatist Kurds.) And few, if any, of Chomsky's admirers have even noticed this. His admirers have been oblivious.

Readers who may wish to explore more deeply the current and very sinister ways in which the US Government is manufacturing consent, will see an especially potent example of that, here.

Copyright applies.

Follow link below for additional embedded information:

<https://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2019/01/04/chomsky-uneared-prestige.html>

