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Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance

By Noam Chomsky

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Sixteen pages into *Hegemony or Survival*, Noam Chomsky quotes the Athenian historian Thucydides as saying that "large nations do what they wish, while small nations accept what they must." In this sobering account of US foreign policy leading up to the Iraq war, the United States is incontrovertibly portrayed as the most extreme example of this centuries-old maxim. Chomsky offers up account after scathing account of the US's apparent attempt to maintain, as international affairs specialist John Ikenberry describes it, "a unipolar world in which the United States has no peer competitor." The worst part, Chomsky claims, is that the US has preserved their power through terrorist groups and methods that they are now publicly claiming to be battling in an international "war on terror."

What most people will find hard to swallow about Chomsky's latest diatribe is the obvious lack of favoritism. While the book focuses on the crimes of the Republican administrations, no politician is left untouched. Every American president, dating back centuries, seems to have had their own disgraceful foreign policy that, no matter how liberal the president, has directly pillaged, plundered, and terrorized another country, or as has supported another regime that has pillaged, plundered, and terrorized their own country.

Even George Washington does not escape injury. Chomsky specifically sites Washington's conquest of the Iroquois in 1779. Washington, known as the "Town destroyer" to the Iroquois, is quoted as wanting to "extirpate them from the country" in order to expand the American frontier further westward. Even worse, Chomsky claims that, after falling to American troops, the Iroquois were forced to provide compensation, in the form Iroquois territory, for resisting their "liberators."

Chomsky does, however, draw most of his ammunition from the Kennedy administration on. He refers to US foreign policy in the Cuban missile crisis at length, and devotes a large section to the US's role in Nicaragua and the lingering effects once US troops pulled out. People may recognize some material from *9-11*, which touched on some of these issues, especially foreign policy during the Regan administration.

The idea that the U.S. has long been launching and sponsoring terrorist campaigns is much harder to prove, of course, than a proposal focusing solely on recent foreign policy, such as the current uproar of WMD's and the Iraq war. There is greater risk in taking on a project such as this, but greater reward. Chomsky seems to come out on top in terms of thoroughness. The entire book is, for the most part, meticulously footnoted, and one needs only to look at the inside cover, copyright page, or back cover to see that there is an entirely separate book online just devoted to Chomsky's findings. Chomsky clearly outlines the facts of each administration's policy and devotes considerable time to each specific example he chooses to illuminate. And, to be fair, Chomsky does illuminate most of them. At the risk of being summary, he covers Nicaragua, Cuba, Russia (and the Soviet Union), Kosovo, East Timor, Colombia, Turkey, Serbia, Afghanistan and, of course, Iraq, just to name a few.

Chomsky, however, also runs into problems with his footnotes, or lack thereof. Though the vast majority of the quotes and data are referenced, a few are not, and Chomsky loses more ground on every quote he does not credit than he gains on those he does. It is natural, and necessary, that omissions detract from an argument to a greater degree than inclusions help it, especially with a book like this.

Hegemony will also be targeted for its apparent hypocrisy. Chomsky repeatedly takes the US news media to task for failing to present clear and unbiased reporting of international affairs and the US's role in them. Chomsky does more than hint at the idea that the media does little to stray from the government's official version of how foreign policy is being carried out. But one

needs only to glance at the footnotes to see that Chomsky references major mainstream news outlets such as *The New York Times*—the very sources he denounces—quite often. Critics found fault with *9-11*, as well, in this respect, and with good reason. One can hardly be expected to accept an argument that draws its support from the very sources it criticizes. The whole idea is completely unpalatable.

Even in light of this, the scales are still tipped in *Hegemony's* favor. Chomsky does not, naturally, base his entire argument on *New York Times* articles and, in reality, many of the most compelling quotes come from sources completely independent of the media, such as official transcripts from the U.N or Senate hearings. Chomsky's argument, in fact, is never in danger of being lost to his hypocrisy—even if he extracted every mainstream news source from his book, he would have a compelling case.

In the end, *Hegemony and Survival* survives. The book overcomes its inconsistencies and successfully proves the core issue; namely, that the US will seemingly do anything within its power to maintain its hegemony. Chomsky's examples of this are chilling, both in their number and severity. *Hegemony and Survival* is a recommended read for anyone who has become uneasy about the given justification for launching a war in Iraq and the increasing lack of transparency in the current administration, and an essential one for those who haven't.