

Book Review

Chomsky, Noam. **HEGEMONY OR SURVIVAL: AMERICA'S QUEST FOR GLOBAL DOMINANCE**. New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC. 2004. 301 pp.

Submitted by
Jason Ma
A.P. U.S. History: Doctor Lechnar
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Noam Chomsky's *Hegemony or Survival* takes an invigorating look at American foreign policy in the twentieth century. He argues that the United States has been fighting wars of questionable morality in order to secure an everlasting dominance of the world. Pointing to the obvious examples of Iraq and Afghanistan, Chomsky looks at historical examples in great detail to support his point. His irrefutable logic leads only to one conclusion – that America has been violating international law to establish and maintain a global empire. Moreover, Chomsky uses his detailed examination of past American actions in Cuba, Nicaragua, Turkey, and elsewhere over the past fifty years coupled with a study of the modern American war in Iraq to expose the dirty tactics that America is using, including brutal murder and torture. In effect, Chomsky convincingly shows that the United States “is just as much a terrorist state as any other government or rogue organization” (Moe).

Chomsky looks at various sections of the American plan of achieving global hegemony, dubbed the “imperial grand strategy.” A major part is making sure the “second superpower,” or world public opinion, is subdued. Chomsky demonstrates that, to meet this end, the United States attempts to destroy countries that do not follow America’s orders by using its vast economic and military power.

For example, in Central America, where fledgling democracies were thriving, the United States saw a threat to its dominance. Painting these new democracies as Communist and Soviet, the United States encouraged rebellion

and internal unrest, financing terrorist groups and furnishing them with arms. These criminals are hailed by the American government as "heroes" who "save" these countries from the "Communist abominations."

A blatant instance of this is in Nicaragua, where the United States supported the Somoza family dictatorship. When the Somoza government was deposed in 1979 and Daniel Ortega and the Sandinistas took power in 1984, implementing ambitious social reforms, the United States, under President Reagan, funded counterrevolutionaries known as Contras. Contras used terrorism with U.S. support to encourage internal unrest and the overthrow the Sandinistas. Moreover, the United States funded the Contras by engaging in the trade of illegal drugs and weapons.

Another issue that Chomsky addresses is American hypocrisy. This is evident, as the United States insists on others complying with international law, yet it exempts itself. In Nicaragua, the United States ignored the World Court ruling in "Military and Paramilitary Activities in and Against Nicaragua" (Nicaragua v. United States of America). Chomsky makes it clear that when crimes are committed, the perpetrator must be punished -- except when it is the United States.

Hegemony or Survival is a book that is filled with history. Although it shows with great clarity the modern role and posture the United States holds in the world, it relies heavily upon historical examples to show the trajectory of modern American foreign policy. Moreover, this book gives a very detailed account of

twentieth-century American history, especially U. S. actions in Central America and the Middle East. Because of attempts to ignore and forget the atrocities committed by Americans in those regions, little is remembered or discussed today. Despite those attempts, this is a part of American history, and, much like the Holocaust, must be remembered if we hope to avoid repeating our mistakes.

As others have noted, this book is "heavily footnoted," demonstrating the very large amount of research done by Chomsky. He uses his trademark logic and superbly illustrates point by point. There is no superfluous information, nor is anything lacking. *Hegemony or Survival* hammers down a solid argument effectively and succinctly. Chomsky uses it well to express his views.

Publisher's Weekly has called *Hegemony or Survival* "highly readable", "cogent", and well documented. Chomsky uses common sense and "builds his arguments carefully[, answering] expected counterclaims". *Booklist* said that he "draw[s] parallels to nineteenth-century Britain", the only other world-power that has existed in history, to examine where the United States might be going. Moreover, holding September 11 as a *carte blanche*, the United States has "accelerated the troubling trend" of acting aggressively and unilaterally, with "disastrous implications" in the realms of both foreign and domestic policy, especially with no superpower to counterbalance it.

Hegemony or Survival has greatly enriched my understanding of American politics. It is true that Chomsky is a leftist and that his views show through his writing. However, he keeps his emotions from dominating the book

and does not allow his biases to control it. The beliefs he expresses are calmly and objectively explained and supported by the facts that, no matter how they are dressed, are undeniable. This book uncovered many skeletons which the United States is trying to ignore and forget, thoroughly waking me up from the dream world of ignorance that many Americans live in and showing the ugly reality that exists. *Hegemony or Survival* is an essential book for all Americans, as this enlightening and provocative work is well-written, lucid, and a pleasure to read.

About Noam Chomsky

Noam Chomsky, an Institute Professor of linguistics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, is well known for developing the Chomsky hierarchy. He has contributed to a wide variety of fields, and his work in generative linguistics contributed significantly to the decline of behaviorism and led to the advancement of the cognitive sciences. Chomsky is also well known for his leftist views, especially in his criticism of the foreign policy of United States.

Chomsky was born on December 7, 1928, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He studied philosophy and linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania with Zellig Harris, a professor of linguistics with whom Chomsky shared political views. Afterwards, he conducted research at Harvard University as a Harvard Junior Fellow, receiving a doctorate in linguistics, also from the University of Pennsylvania. His doctoral thesis included some of his linguistic ideas, which he developed further into his book *Syntactical Structures*, his best known book in linguistics. He then taught for nineteen years at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. While he was at MIT, events occurring in the Vietnam War pushed him to express his political views more publicly. He published numerous essays against the Vietnam War, including *American Power and the New Mandarins*. Since then, he has spoken all over the world and is widely known for not only his landmark linguistics work but also his radical political views.

He tries not to categorize his beliefs, preferring to let his views speak for themselves, because his views are very different from traditional liberalism and

conservatism. Nevertheless, he has described himself broadly as a libertarian socialist and as an anarchist, specifically an anarcho-syndicalist, which is labor-oriented. He stresses that he is different from most anarchists, as he does not always object to electoral politics. Thus, he explains that he is a "fellow traveler" to the traditional anarchism, not a pure anarchist.

He has also defined himself as a Zionist, noting that his definition of Zionism is considered by many to be anti-Zionism. He attributes this difference to a shift in the definition of Zionism, which he believes began in the 1940s, stating, "I have always supported a Jewish ethnic homeland in Palestine" but that a Jewish state is "entirely another matter".

Works Cited

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