RESEARCH ONLINE

Asia Pacific Media Educator

Issue 14 Article 15

12-1-2003

Book review: Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance

David Blackall
University of Wollongong, dblackal@uow.edu.au

Recommended Citation
Blackall, David, Book review: Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance, *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 14, 2003, 169-171.
Available at:http://ro.uow.edu.au/apme/vol1/iss14/15

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au

RESEARCH ONLINE

CHOMSKY, NOAM (2003)
Hegemony Or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance,
Allen & Unwin, Sydney. 278 pp. ISBN 1 74114 162 1
Paperback price: A$24.95

Reviewed by David Blackall
Graduate School of Journalism
University of Wollongong

This book is most likely to polarize readers - those whose arguments are reinforced or those who see it as essentially conspiracy theory. If for some time you have agreed with Noam Chomsky's journalism and his other books and essays, then you will most likely agree with the pitch on the back cover – "from the world's foremost intellectual activist, an irrefutable analysis of America's pursuit of total world domination and the catastrophic consequences that will follow". As an institute professor of philosophy, linguistics and linguistic theory, Chomsky's discourse analysis drives the contention that America's superpower mindset is hell bent on domination and this is pitched against the second superpower – world public opinion. Public relations and propaganda are the weapons used to serve the power elite: largely, the US oil companies and their greedy thirst for oil and other energy resources. The exploitation of other peoples' fossil fuels and a militaristic foreign policy in gaining access to the same, attracts terrorism, which justifies the clamping down on domestic civil rights in the name of homeland security.

Hegemony or Survival is an important book if only to remind us that this war on terror is keeping a pliable US public in fear while overseas US foreign policy is creating markets for the real WMDs – small arms, land mines and ground-to-air heat seeking missiles – mostly made in the United States, United Kingdom and Russia.

The American concept of the unilateral pre-emptive military strike has now set new and dangerous precedents so that nations like Indonesia, India, Israel and even Australia (in John Howard's terms at least) are following suit. This, Chomsky argues, is coupled with the USA's paranoid militarisation of space, the development of ballistic missile defences and the total disregard of numerous international covenants.

The US Department of Defence and the CIA, like the neighbouring countries in the Middle East, knew perfectly well that Iraq posed no threat to anyone in the region, let alone to the United States, and as printed on July 22, 2002 in the Guardian, "to argue otherwise is dishonest" (p. 41). Using the war on terrorism

to manufacture fear and consent for aggressive action, the Bush government's strategies, more so than previous US presidents, is setting the agenda for the next critical phase of violent protest from the other superpower – the global public.

Although the book is hailed as rigorously referenced, there are recurring attribution problems: we read "Abroad, public diplomacy . . . failed badly," the international press reported, but "at home it has succeeded brilliantly in linking the war on Iraq with the trauma of September 11." One has to ask: which international press? The English language version of *Pravda* or perhaps the *Guardian,* and certainly not in Sydney's Murdoch press, *The Australian* or *The Daily Telegraph* - John Howard's favourite paper. Across the US population "[N]early 90 percent believe [Saddam's] regime is aiding and abetting terrorists who are planning future strikes against the US'" (pp. 18-19).

While this is all strong discourse for arguing the case for an imperial US grand strategy, some 'quotes' provide no clue of their source. Chomsky seems to be selective about citation with only some attributed. Political analyst Anatol Lieven, for instance, appears to be attributed with accuracy: "most Americans were 'duped . . . by a propaganda programme which for systematic mendacity has few parallels in peacetime democracies" (p. 19). Annoyingly, the attribution is unclear and does not serve the overall political motive.

This book has arrived after a number of bestseller compilations of journalism and essays and *Hegemony or Survival* in particular, appears to have humble beginnings arising in July of 2001 from an on-line two-part essay of the same title. The book rails relentlessly against the various White House administrations since the late 1950s, and yet there is further need for clarification and substantiation – not everyone will be convinced

From reading Chomsky in the past, we know he often paints with a very broad theoretical brush and many of the claims he makes are, in fact, quite open to debate. But this highly accessible analysis of US foreign policy, guides a "compliant" reader to conclude that current US processes in Afghanistan and Iraq are not so much in response to September 11, but simply the continuation of a consistent fifty years of foreign policy. This, like the Roman Empire 2000 years before, amounts to a simplistic "smoke 'em out" military diplomacy instead of the fairer alternative - civilian based multilateral dialogue.

Such a study as *Hegemony or Survival* is perhaps destined to attract antipathy from some after losing loved ones in New York's September 11 or in other tragedies like those of Iraq, Bali, Turkey or Saudi Arabia. But Chomsky carefully constructs his arguments

and largely substantiates his assertions in readiness for the inevitable counter-arguments. He is right in being as critical as possible of the inconsistency the US applies in accusing others of "terrorism". Its own official definition (in law) describes exactly its own reign of interventionist terror in respect to Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Cuba, Central America and the Middle East. With growing archival evidence and reportage from the late Australian journalist Wilfred Burchett, it is becoming apparent that anthrax was used experimentally by the US in the Korean War - against civilians in the north and across the border in China. We also know that perspectives on history, like *Hegemony or Survival*, are not new. In the English language at least, writers like Robert Fiske, Wilfred Burchett and John Pilger have for years substantiated and built arguments like those of Chomsky.

Perhaps it should be argued that if the analysis of *Hegemony or Survival* went further into the last century of US foreign policy, the same pattern of imperialism would emerge. Of compelling interest to journalism educators and their students – is why veteran journalists and historians like Burchett are ignored or silenced; and classified, at best, as unconventional and irrational, and at worst, as traitors. It is a compliant news media that is easily distracted by the sleazy tactics of PR and propaganda. Amongst the many Chomsky assertions, there are potentially as many good journalism stories in the global public interest, which can be started by researching reliable government sites on the Internet. One story of potential found in *Hegemony or Survival*, is that the "US Strategic Command (STRAT-COM) described nuclear weapons as the most valuable . . . unlike chemical or biological weapons, the extreme destruction from a nuclear explosion is immediate, with few if any palliatives to reduce its effect." (p. 218)

The principle of persuasion, says Chomsky, is amazingly uncomplicated and is applied similarly by democratic governments everywhere. When there is a desire of the power elite to move on an issue, and the population is generally opposed, then the issue is removed from the political arena and from the news media priorities – distraction being a primary method. As journalism educators we should be constantly acknowledging this simple principle: it works with astonishing regularity and reliability. When, for instance, John Howard's government does it, our public can be excused because we have a compliant news media that assists in making the plan work seamlessly on so many occasions. So long as a government can keep the propaganda flowing, the media duped, the journalists distracted - the process will work. That is one imperative of journalism education - getting those simple issues, understandings and realities back on the learning agenda. ■