

'Hegemony' an extensive look at American interests

If you are interested in understanding – really understanding – how the United States came to be such a dominant player on the world stage, and how it continues to increasingly exert its influence over other countries, then “Global Energy Security and American Hegemony” by Doug Stokes and Sam Raphael should definitely be on your reading list.

“Military, political, and economic dominance over the world’s important regions has represented the grand strategic objective of the U.S. state in the postwar era,” the authors assert. “Not for reasons of preserving international peace and security, not for promoting democracy and human rights, but for the purposes of maintaining its extraordinary levels of prosperity and power vis-à-vis the rest of the world.”

In case there is any confusion about their primary thesis, the authors reiterate it in slightly more definitive terms: “The primary logic which drives U.S. statecraft has been a desire to secure and maintain the conditions which best serve its own economic and political interests.”

Stokes is a senior lecturer in international politics at the University of Kent at Canterbury. Prior to this collaboration, he published “America’s Other War: Terrorizing Columbia.” Raphael is a lecturer in politics, human rights and international relations with the School of Social Sciences at Kingston University.

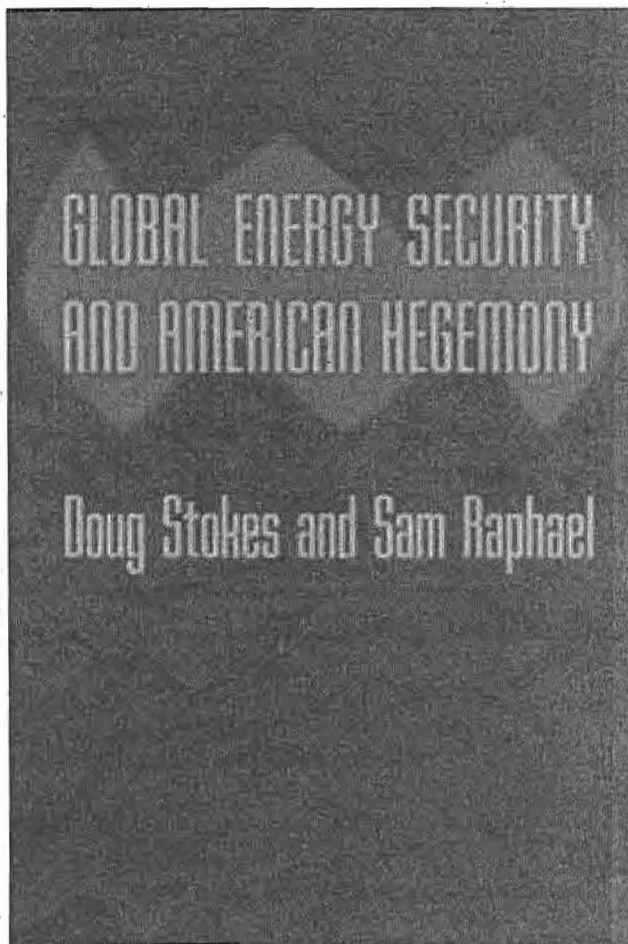
“Hegemony” is one of the most extensively researched books you will ever have occasion to read; there are 52 pages of citations at the conclusion of the main text. Every statement the authors make is carefully and meticulously attributed to credible sources. If you decide to take issue with their argument, then you had better do your homework.

At the heart of the book is the irrefutable notion that oil will continue to be a primary driver of the American political and military agenda for the foreseeable future. The authors remind us that every U.S. president since Richard Nixon has talked about the need to find alternative sources of energy, although their actions have seldom been consistent with what everyone seems to agree is a true premise.

“There are currently no viable sources of energy that can replace a carbon-based global economy, even though its use continues to threaten potentially devastating forms of climate change,” Stokes and Raphael note. “The sheer scale of American dependency on oil, and the pervasive nature of this dependency, means that U.S. planners will undoubtedly continue to forge strategies to secure unfettered access to global reserves.”

“This reliance on oil for American global military dominance understandably means that U.S. defense planners are concerned with ensuring uninterrupted access to reserves,” they add.

The authors do an exceptional job of outlining exactly how the United States became such a master manipulator of global eco-



“Global Energy Security and American Hegemony,” by Doug Stokes and Sam Raphael. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. 280 pages, \$30 (cloth).

nomics – and the extent to which its leaders are willing to go to make sure that this preeminent status is maintained.

At the same time, Stokes and Raphael are well aware that the actions of the government are often out of alignment with the desires of the general population. “There is a massive disconnect between the actions of the American state and the wishes of the American people,” they assert. “A large majority of Americans reject the role of the United States as a global hegemon and favor a more altruistic foreign policy that is independent of U.S. national interests.”

The bulk of the book is dedicated to an exhaustive discussion of four world regions: the Persian Gulf, the Caspian Basin, West Africa and Latin America. The sixth chapter, “Latin America: Capital, Crude, and Counterinsurgency in America’s Backyard,” is perhaps their best. Stokes and Raphael paint a very critical and eye-opening portrait of the consequences of the U.S. policy of preserving its political, economic and military supremacy regardless of the impact on sovereign governments in our own hemisphere.

After a brief yet remarkably informative review of the way Central and South America have traditionally been viewed by the U.S. government, the authors then proceed to explain how this attitude of superiority continues right up to the present day. “Counterinsurgency has become the strategy par excellence for the containment and rollback of

social forces considered inimical to U.S. global interests,” Stokes and Raphael argue. “The human costs of these policies have often been shocking.”

“The United States may no longer sponsor dictatorships in Latin America; it does, however, continue to insulate processes of economic liberalization from challenge by the provision of substantial support to regional militaries,” the authors observe. “The destruction of local industry and farming sectors as a result of the increased freedom of movement by large foreign corporations, under ‘free trade’ has led to an increase in malnutrition and unemployment and a decline in living standards.”

The problem, the authors assert, is that the “free market” has never been given a legitimate chance for success in Latin America. Mostly, it has referred to the freedom of U.S. companies to do essentially whatever they want in the region.

Hegemony is not always easy to decipher; it goes well beyond the superficial discourse that tends to characterize most of today’s popular media. But if you are truly interested in learning how the “real world” works in 2010, then it should be considered required reading.

With just a little effort, you might be able to interpret the events and perspectives reported on the various “news” channels in a much more meaningful and discerning way.

— Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University