



An Empire If You Can Keep It: Power and Principle in American Foreign Policy

Thomas Magstadt

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Drawing on the Bush administration's foreign policy maneuvering and the realities of a post-9/11 world, Thomas M. Magstadt goes beyond a mere recitation of events in U.S. diplomatic history. He instead paints a vivid portrayal of the tension between the pursuit of power and the adherence to principle deeply embedded in the nation's political culture.

Magstadt traces the country's move from vulnerable upstart in 1789 to great power by 1898 to unrivaled dominance at the turn of the twenty-first century. The United States started off relatively weak in the international balance of power system, giving rise to isolationism and a rhetorical flourish grounded in moral principles. But now, as the world's only superpower, considerations of security and self-interest compete head-to-head with the moral imperative for global leadership and the promotion of democratic ideals.

The dynamics of process also matter in this struggle. This brief text illuminates the complexities of both policy- and decision-making in a way that balances coverage more compactly and more analytically than core texts do, thereby improving readability and student critical thinking.

An Empire If You Can Keep It avoids polemics but does not shy away from the controversy raging in intellectual and policy circles over the Bush Doctrine. Magstadt places recent foreign policy developments in the context of America's historic sense of purpose, stressing the search for a new consensus and a new balance between power and principle, between hard and soft power.

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