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This book is about international telecommunications over the second half of the 20th century. It follows Hills’ 2002 book *The Struggle for Control of Global Communication*, about the ‘formative century’ up to the Second World War. The first book covered the rise and eclipse of British dominance; the second, the American attempt ‘to create a US Empire’ (217).

Hills establishes five models of telecoms networks that incorporate international and domestic elements. Under the ‘European State’, or ‘state-to-state’ model, publicly-controlled national monopoly telcos link to each other. ‘End-to-end’ networks allow a single operator to reach customers directly at home and abroad without interconnecting with other networks. Under the ‘Western Union’ model, a nation state’s domestic operator connects directly to customers at home and abroad, as the US telegraph company Western Union did, but overseas operators are required to interconnect with a domestic operator like it to distribute their traffic inside the US. The other two models are variants of these. ‘Empire Rules’ networks are private ‘end-to-end’ networks run by non-telco multinationals. ‘WTO model’ networks are like ‘European state-to-state’ ones, except the publicly-controlled telcos that link to each other now face domestic competition. These models are useful, though explaining the overlaps and subtle distinctions between them sometimes complicates the simpler, central message about power and ways it has been exercised.

Over six carefully-researched chapters, Hills explains the ‘disparate attempts by US agencies and personnel to use direct and indirect US power to gain control over sovereign governments’ (217). ‘A world in its own market image would allow telecommunications to be the electronic conduit for the global expansion of US economic control.’ (218) Invariably, these have been efforts to secure ‘end-to-end’ or ‘Empire Rules’ networks for US-based companies, and to minimize the regulation of those networks in foreign countries. The US has used several approaches to achieve these aims: unilateral edicts from the FCC or the administration; attempts to control, replace, bypass or restructure multilateral institutions like the ITU and the GATT; the creation of private, US corporations to run international activities, such as Comsat and ICANN; and bilateral trade deals like NAFTA.

Despite the enduring intensity of its efforts, Hills argues the US has only been partially successful. In this conclusion lie the limits of the overall thesis. The US has partially failed because other nation states and blocs, pursuing their own interests with equal vigour though very unequal resources, have sometimes partially succeeded themselves with similar acts of unilateralism, preferentialism and forum-shopping – building a rival global network like the British Commonwealth’s after the war; turning Comsat into Intelsat; resisting US ambitions in the negotiations over the WTO’s reference paper on basic telecommunications; burying the OECD’s Multilateral Agreement on Investment. This is the stuff of international relations. To interpret these partial successes as laudable victories for national sovereignty over off-shore control is true but insufficient in a world where the national identities and loyalties of many corporations are cloudy and national interests can be torn between the sovereignty of, say, an undemocratic nation state like China and a US-based global corporation like Google.
Hills’ thesis, that the US attempted to expand its control of overseas markets while protecting its domestic market from foreign penetration, is hardly controversial. But because its efforts and partial success have been such a feature of global politics, economics and trade policy, so central to the post-war world but now so fundamentally challenged, the thesis well deserves this re-stating.

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