America's Impact:

The End of Empire and the Globalization of the Westphalian System

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WORD COUNT: 13,895

Introduction

Over the last two and a half centuries, the most important change in the international political system has been the decline of empire, and the simultaneous spread of the Westphalian system of sovereign states, from Europe to universal global scope. Empire – the direct coercive rule of one people over another – has almost vanished from world politics.[1] Where once the world was made up of regional systems – most of which were empires – the contemporary world is marked by a large number of sovereign states, now nearly two hundred.[2] Over these centuries,

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[1] In this paper, we follow the standard definition of "empire" in the literature of international relations theory and world historiography which characterizes empire as a political form marked by the rule of one political society over another, on the basis of conquest and superior power. Doyle, 1986. Thus empire differs from what some scholars refer to as "informal empire" and to forms of hegemonic preponderance that stop short of direct rule. Others use empire in different and more expansive senses. One ambiguity stems from the widespread use in American political thought of "empire" to refer to a large and powerful polity, such as in Jefferson's talk of an "empire for liberty." Taking a more expansive definition, recent Marxian thinkers characterize the global capitalist system as itself an empire, in Hardt and Negri, 2000. Employing the most expansive definition are post-modern and post-colonial theorists who characterize modernity and systems of instrumental rationality as imperial. For discussion of historical origins and evolution in terminology: Koebner, 1961; Koebner and Schmidt, 1964.

[2] The spread of the Westphalian system is what David Armitage has called "the most momentous but least widely understood development of modern history." He notes that "[u]ntil at least the late nineteenth century, and in many places for decades after, most of the world's population

one state – the United States – initially at the periphery of the European imperial system, has become the most powerful and influential state in the system.

There are many debates about America in the international system. One prominent argument developed extensively, particularly by recent historians, is that the United States is, and has been throughout its history, imperial and an empire. This view is widely held by many, both inside and outside the United States. In this view, the United States continued the Western imperial project as European empires faltered in the 20th century, and in the second half of the 20th century created the last and most extensive empire with global reach.[3] Arguments along

lived in the territorially expansive, internally diverse, hierarchically organized political communities called empires." But by the end of the 20th century, "[i]t is a striking feature of our political world that humanity is now divided into so many states but it is equally significant that there is no longer any self-styled empires." Armitage, 2013.

[3] The literature on America and empire is very large and rapidly growing, and marked by many fundamental disagreements. In perhaps the most recent complete comparative assessment, Charles Maier hesitates to characterize the U.S. presence in the world as an empire. Maier, 2006; Suri, 2009. Taking the opposite view are essays in Calhoun, Cooper, and Moore, 2006; and Go, 2011. Three recent full length arguments for America as empire are found in Ferguson, 2004; Johnson, 2004; and Mann, 2003. A large body of American historiography of the "Wisconsin School" follows the lead of William Appleman Williams, in Williams, 1966, in constructing a narrative of American history as continuous imperial expansion. Among recent contributions to this line of historical characterization are Drinon, 1980; Stephanson,1995; and Immerman, 2010. Also viewing the U.S. as an empire and U.S. foreign policy as imperial is work of the political historian Andrew J. Bracevich, 2002, who builds on the arguments of Charles Beard and others,

these lines are of more than just of academic interest because they connect to national identity

narratives in many parts of the world, including the rising states of China and India, which

emphasize anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism, as well as grievances against Western

imperialism.[4]

In this paper, we challenge this view and offer a different account of the American impact

on the world which emphasizes that the United States has played a key role in the decline of

empire and the globalization of the Westphalian system. In contrast to those who view the

United States as an empire, and thus as essentially antagonistic to the Westphalian sovereign

state system, we argue that the United States, in an overall ledger sheet of impacts, has been

influential against imperialism and colonialism, and has been powerfully supportive of the

spread of the Westphalian system. We argue that contemporary views of the United States as

imperial profoundly misrepresent the overall impact the United States has had on the

international system over the last two and a half centuries. In this paper, we lay out the evidence

for how the United States has played a major and often decisive role as an anti-imperial and anti-

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in emphasizing its economic and class roots. In the wake of the end of the Cold War, and

especially, the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, many critics have attacked U.S. foreign policy as

imperial, such as John Newhouse, 2003. Many European observers also see "American empire"

in contemporary world politics, with leading statements in Ferguson, 2004; Todd, 2002.

[4] For a detailed treatment, based on extensive empirical research in the contemporary foreign

policy identity discourse in China and India: Miller, 2013. Also, based on extensive interviews,

Nau and Ollapally, 2012.

colonial force. More than any other state in the system, we argue, the United States has undermined empire and spread of the Westphalian system.

Of course, the decline of empire and the spread of the Westphalian system are the result of many forces, including the diffusion of military capabilities, the growth of the international trading system, the rise of nationalism, and the spread of anti-colonial and human rights norms have all played powerful roles in diminishing the effectiveness of imperialism and the attractiveness and longevity of empires.[5] But efforts to create empires continued well into the 20th century, and their lack of success stemmed not just from these broader trends in ideas and power but also from the grand strategies of the leading states – most notably the United States – in directly opposing the creation and perpetuation of empires. To be sure, the United States has been imperial and briefly had an empire in some times and places. But these episodes, we argue, are greatly overshadowed in their overall impact by American anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism. And the global spread of the Westphalian system, by no means solely resulting from American actions, has been more advanced by American foreign policies than of any other state in the system.

There are four broad reasons why the American role as anti-imperial and pro-Westphalian have been underappreciated. First, many view the liberal international order, which the United States has played such a pivotal role in creating over the 20th century, as a challenge to the Westphalian system and a replacement for it, rather than an addition to it. Second, America's centrality in the globalization of the Westphalian system through the thwarting and dismantlement of empire has been obscured by the widespread tendency to conceive of Europe

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[5] Darwin, 2012; Reus-Smit, 2013; Jackson, 1993.

and the United States as together making up "the West."[6] This makes it all too easy to see

Europe's centuries of imperialism being continued by the United States. In contrast, we argue

that a major dynamic in world politics has pitted an "old West" of European imperialisms against

the anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism of a "new West" in America. Third, the historical

literature on modern empire building widely identifies two waves of activity (the first from the

16th century to the early 19th century, and the second from the 19th century to the beginning of the

20th). We identify two additional waves of empire building, in the World Wars and then in the

Cold War. When these two additional waves are brought back into the picture, the case for

seeing the United States as anti-imperial and anti-colonial is significantly strengthened, since the

United States played such a prominent role in thwarting and dismantling these late-empire

building efforts. Fourth, many contemporary observers of America's impact on the world focus

on infamous moments when the United States did exercise crude imperial behavior: in the many

military interventions and covert actions in Latin America and the Middle East over the last

century and, most saliently, the 2003 American invasion of Iraq. We do not seek to ignore or

justify these episodes and patterns of behavior. The United States has been imperial in some

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[6] Recent "civilizational" analyses have emphasized the "West" and its relationships with other

civilizational groupings, thus obscuring the important distinction between the United States and

Europe with regard to imperialism and colonialism. In Huntington, 1996, this distinction is

almost invisible. Another civilizational argument, by Katzenstein, 2012, does split the "West"

but along different lines, by positing an Anglo-American civilization that has been ascendant

both in Europe and globally across much of the modern era. For the ways in which the Cold War

contributed to the strengthening of "the West" as an identity: Latham, 1997.

ways and in some instances. But we seek to place them in the context of what we argue is America's more significant impact on the organization of the global system.

In contemporary debates, this argument undercuts, modifies, and qualifies characterizations held by so many of the United States as essentially imperial, and the American order as an empire. In our rendering, the United State is not the last Western empire, but the first anti-imperial and post-imperial great power in the global system. Our argument is thus focused on the <u>consequences</u> of American foreign policy for the evolution of the international system, and we do not in this confined treatment offer an explanation for the <u>origins</u> of U.S. foreign policy. In short, we offer an argument about impacts rather than the sources of America's anti-imperial and pro-Westphalian role.

Empires and State Systems: Historical Patterns

Empire has been the historically predominant form of order in world politics. Looking at a time frame of several millennia, there was no global anarchic system until the European explorations and subsequent imperial and colonial ventures connected desperate regional systems, doing so approximately five hundred years ago.[7] Prior to this emergence of a global-scope system, the pattern of world politics was characterized by regional systems. These regional systems were initially very anarchic, and marked by high levels of military competition. But almost universally, they tended to consolidate into regional empires which had fairly limited

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[7] For broad historical surveys of ancient and modern empires and global patterns of imperial rise and decline: Darwin, 2009; Burbank and Cooper, 2011.

interactions with polities outside their regions.[8] Thus, it was empires – not anarchic state systems – that typically dominated the regional systems in all parts of the world.

Within this global pattern of regional empires, European political order was distinctly anomalous because it persisted so long as an anarchy. Despite repeated efforts to consolidate Europe into one empire – or what the Europeans referred to as "universal monarchy" – this region remained a plural, multi-state political order. After the Peace of Westphalia ending the Thirties Year War, this plural anarchic system, the Westphalian system, and was sustained by a rough balance of power among its autonomous states and the weakness of the claimants of European empire. This Westphalian system was based on a roughly equal distribution of power among its major units, sustained by various balancing practices that thwarted a succession of regional European empire-builders, and had an elaborate system of public international law and ideological justification.[9] While this system rested on a balance of power, it was juridically crystallized into a system of mutually recognized sovereigns.

Outside of Europe, however, the European states, including those that were most active in preventing empire within Europe, were extraordinarily successful in conquering and colonizing

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[8] For similarities in the structure of these empires: Wesson,1967; Eisenstadt, 1963; Eisenstadt, 1967. In the macro-historical work of Arnold J. Toynbee,1954, now fallen into disfavor among historians, civilizations, the main unit across history, tend to culminate in a "universal state." For the emergence of regional empires as failures of the "balance of power": Kaufman, Little and Wohlforth, 2007.

[9] For depictions of the Westphalian state system: Hinsley, 1963; Bull,1977; Holsti, 1991; Osiander, 1994.

vast areas across oceanic distances.[10] The Europeans did not invent empire, but they were spectacularly successful at empire building on a global scope, largely because of the imbalance of power that stemmed from European innovations in technology and organization.[11] The Europeans conquered and dominated empires, states, and peoples in every previously loosely coupled or isolated regional system across the world. The Europeans also successfully planted numerous colonies of settlers, mainly in the temperate zones in North and South America, Oceania, and the southern tip of Africa.[12] States from the Western European core of the

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[10] For the ideologies of European expansion: Pagden, 1994; Armitage, 2000.

[11] Among the large literature on technological factors in European expansion: Cipolla, 1965. Of particular note is Daniel R. Headrick's analysis of how successive waves of expansion by the Europeans and their settler colonies were shaped by particular innovations in military and naval capabilities. Headrick, 2010.

[12] The "new environmental history" has made major contributions to understanding the patterns, and limits, of European global expansion. The now classic study by Crosby, 1988, established the role of ecology and climate in confining European settler colonization to temperate zones, and excluding it from the tropics. Focusing on the 'American Mediterranean' the environmental historian J.R. McNeill, shows the frequent role of insect borne infectious disease in decisively limiting imperial and colonial ventures in McNeill, 2010. Focusing on the long line of arguments stretching from the Greeks through modern era that attribute political outcomes to various natural-geographic variations, the Marxist historian J.M. Blaut shows how such arguments commonly conflated *explanations* of differences with *justifications* for imperialism. Blaut, 1993.

Westphalian system thus brought into existence a global-scale political system made up of vast multi-continental empires of conquered peoples and a scattering of colonial "new Europes."[13]

This pattern of European empire building was different from its predecessors, not just in its global scope, but also because the European states were continuously warring against one another for dominance within Europe. These struggles between states within Europe against empire in Europe were fought on a global scale. Thus the first "world war," defined as a war fought across multiple continents, occurred in the later 18th century. In this struggle Britain sought to thwart French attempts to dominate Europe and the battle lines were in Europe, North America, South Asia, and across the global oceans. This pattern of the globalization of intra-European warfare continued in the 20th century with the wars triggered by German efforts to dominate Europe. The growing imbalance of power between the Europeans and the rest of the world during the 18th and 19th century enabled the Europeans to easily expand their empires at the expense of non-Europeans. But during the same periods, the Europeans found it very difficult to conquer each other within Europe. Thus vast armies wrought great destruction fighting over tiny parcels of land in Europe, while comparatively small European imperial expeditionary forces readily mastered non-European armies in the Americas, Africa, and Asia.

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[13] Reflecting this duality of sovereign equality in the Westphalian system and imperial expansion beyond it, the public international law developed by the early Europeans was thus notoriously "two faced," preserving sovereignty and membership of the "society of states" to Europeans, while the doctrine of "terra nullius" allowed European predation over non-Europeans, particularly those not organized into states. For discussions: Grovogui, 1996; Keene, 2002; and Keal, 2003.

Thus a balance of power underpinned the Westphalian system in Europe, while an imbalance of power between Europe and the world underpinned imperial expansion.

Anti-imperial and anti-colonial rebellions and resistance are as old as empires, but successful rebellion against European imperial rule outside Europe began in the 18th century with the revolt of the colonial settler colonies in the Americas – first in North America and then in South America. This first wave of settler-colony rebellion marked the end of what historians refer to as the "first British empire," as well as the first great European empire in the Americas, that of Spain. The success of this first wave of anti-imperial rebellion in Spanish America was crucially facilitated by the weakening of Spain during the Napoleonic wars for domination within Europe.

In the later-19th century, European empire building outside of Europe entered a second wave, enabled by the new industrial technologies that further amplified the imbalance of power between Europeans and non-Europeans, which in turn allowed the Europeans to extend their imperial domination into the large interior spaces of the continents, particularly in Africa and Asia.[14] In the 20th century, further wars among the core European states weakened Britain, France, and Holland, the leading European colonial powers, thus creating opportunities for anti-imperial independence movements in Asia and Africa. Paradoxically, the fact that the Europeans were continuously fighting one another fueled their imperial ambitions and successes, while at the same time, such wars weakened them and helped enable the success of rebellions against

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[14] For the second wave of expansion: Abernathy, 2000; Ballantyne and Burton, 2012; Betts,1985. As technological advance amplified European power, Europeans deployed the novel argument that European ascendency was justified by European technological progress, explored at length in Adas, 1989.

their empires.[15] Thus as the British empire was reaching its territorial zenith in the early years of the 20th century, Britain was critically weakened by the world wars in Europe and Asia against the aspiring German and Japanese empire builders.

The territorial aggression of the Axis Powers constitute a third wave of empire building which was short lived and thwarted by the successful mobilization of the "United Nations," a coalition led by the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and China. A fourth wave of empire building, by the Soviet Union and the international communist movement in the second half of the 20th century, was thwarted and dismantled by the United States and its allies.

The Pattern of American Anti-Imperial, Anti-Colonial, and Pro-Westphalian Impacts

Against the backdrop of this evolution of the international system and the four waves of empire building and dismantlement, it becomes possible to see more clearly the many ways in which the United States played important anti-imperial, anti-colonial, and pro-Westphalian roles.[16]

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[15] For synoptic but succinct views of this weakening: Abernathy, 2000; von Albertini, 1969.

[16] Throughout the 19th and much of the 20th century, American historiography, following the model of "national history" writing in Europe, tended to view the United States as unique and to tell its story as essentially an internal story. But in the later years of the 20th century, "The New International History" has sought to view America in "international and comparative perspective," and has explored the many ways in which American historical events had parallels elsewhere, and the ways in which transnational flows of people, goods, and ideas shaped American developments. A wide ranging synthesis is provided in Bender, 2006. A similar move has marked recent work by geographers, most notably in Meinig's four volume, 1986, 1993, 1998, 2004.

In each of the four waves of empire building and dismantlement, the United States had an impact. The United States was the first "new nation" to emerge from a rebellion against European imperial rule during the first wave of modern empire. The United States also supported the independence of other European settler colonies throughout the Americas and, with the Monroe Doctrine, helped sustain their independence against European efforts to recolonize parts of the Americas. In the second wave of late 19th century empire-building, the United States, despite its great relative power, did not establish an empire of its own of any significance or duration. And during the latter part of the 20th century, the United States pushed European decolonization, thus facilitating the breakup of second wave empires. In the great world wars in the 20th century, the United States played an important role in thwarting a third wave of imperial projects of Germany, Japan, and Italy. In the second half of the 20th century, the United States played decisive roles, both ideological and military, in thwarting the fourth wave of empire building, the expansion of the communist great power, the Soviet Union, as well as communist coups and revolutions in many weak and small independent states.

Table One

America's Anti-Imperial Roles and Impacts

	Period	Empire Builders	Role of America in Imperial Decline	Significance of Impact
1st wave	15th to 18th Century	Spain, Portugal, France, Holland, Britain in Americas & Asia	American independence & decline of 1st British Empire/ Monroe Doctrine	high
2nd wave	late 19th to early 20th century	Britain, France, Germany, and Holland in Africa & Asia	U.S. support for de-colonialization	medium
3rd wave	1930s & 1940s	Germany, Japan, & Italy in Europe, Africa, and Asia	leader of anti-imperial alliance	very high
4th wave	1945-1989	Soviet Union in Europe & Asia	leader of anti-imperial alliance	very high

The United States also played a variety of important roles in building and strengthening Westphalian institutions, moderating inter-state anarchy, and facilitating the ability of states to survive as independent members of international society. From its inception, the United States was precocious in its support for the law of nations, the institutions of the society of states, particularly the laws of war and neutrality, and public international law, as a means of restraining war and aggression. In both the 19th and 20th centuries, the United States, first regionally and then globally, inspired and helped legitimate anti-colonial and anti-imperial independence movements and national liberation struggles among peoples struggling against empires all over the world. In the 20th century, the United States led the efforts to institutionalize Westphalian norms of non-aggression and sovereign independence, first with the League of Nations and then with the United Nations Charter. In the second half of the 20th century, the American-led liberal international order institutionalized free trade and multilateral cooperation, thus providing the infrastructure for a global economic system, thus enabling smaller and weaker states to sustain their sovereign. Also in the second half of the 20th century, the American system of military alliances contributed to the dampening of violent conflicts among allied states, particularly in Europe and East Asia, thus protecting the Westphalian system from the return of violent conflict and empire-building.

Table Two:

America's Pro-Westphalian Roles and Impacts

	U.S. role	systemic consequence
19th-20th c	support law of nations	moderate anarchy
19th-20th c	legitimate anti-colonial movements	support basis for sovereign statehood
20th c	non-aggression/ L of N & UN	moderate inter-state anarchy
20th c	free trade & multinational cooperation	made more small states viable
20th c	military alliance system	made more small states viable

Taken together, these varied American activities in the world clearly provide strong preliminary evidence for our claim that the United States has significantly contributed to the dismantlement of empires, the thwarting of further empire-building, and to the universalization, institutionalization, and stabilization of the Westphalian state-system.

The Historical Record: The American Anti-Imperial Project and the Global Expansion of the Westphalian System

We now turn to a more detailed demonstration of the American impact across time and space, looking at six important periods and episodes in which the United States shaped the international system in ways subversive of empire and supportive of the Westphalian system.

1) Dismantling the First Wave of European Empire

The beginning of the United States is also the beginning of its anti-imperial contribution. The rebellion of the thirteen British colonies on the Atlantic seaboard of North America between 1775 and 1783 established American independence and began a wave of successful rebellion against European rule throughout the Americas. The American Declaration of Independence of 1776 marked an important milestone in the development of the Westphalian system because it made the American case for independence from the British empire in terms of the general principle of the illegitimacy of imperial rule, and because it asserted that the United States was not just an independent political community but also a sovereign member of the Westphalian

society of states.[17] The Declaration appealed to universal principles, to a natural right for self-determination, and to a right of rebellion against oppressive alien government. In making the case for American independence on advanced Enlightenment doctrines of natural rights, Lockean principles of revolution, and the laws of nations, the Declaration also underscored the fact that the founding principles of the new regime were not based on ethnic particularities but rather on political regime principles with potentially universal application. Americans viewed the laws of nations specified by Vattel and others as embodying these principles, and throughout the 19th century, and beyond, the United States did much to support and extend this restraining "societal" aspect of the Westphalian system.[18]

The ability of the tiny population of rebellious English settlers to vindicate their claims to independence against the naval and military power of the British Empire was greatly aided by the distances between North America and Europe, and the great difficulty that the British had in subduing an American population dispersed over a large inland area. The American quest for independence was also significantly assisted by the balance of power among rival states in the Westphalian European system. Holland and France, rivals of Britain in Europe and elsewhere, first recognized American independence, and provided crucial naval support and financial aid.[19]

The American Revolution had a profound "contagion effect," in part because of the universality of its principles. The rebellion of the Americans, "a shot heard round the world," inspired anti-monarchical replication revolutionaries throughout Europe, and particularly in France. The early stages of the French revolution were inspired by the events across the Atlantic

[17] Armitage, 2007; Bender, 2006, p. 61.
[18] Lang, 1985; Sofka, 2000.

[19] For the military aspects of this conflict: Ferling, 2007. For its international aspects: Tucker and Hendrickson, 1982.

in America, and its leaders sought to recast France with the political principles and forms of government of the American revolutionaries. This revolution was also a catalyst for the rebellions against European rule in the colonies of Spain across Latin America.[20] Both the American and French revolutions provided inspiration for the Latin American wave of anti-monarchial revolutions. The leaders of these rebellions in Spanish America, most notably Simon Bolivar and San Martin, made appeal to universal Enlightenment principles of liberal democratic natural rights and national self-determination.[21] The effort of the Spanish colonists to break away was aided by the early recognition of their independence by the United States.   In the south as well as the north of the Americas, the great distances from Europe and the large land-areas with dispersed settler populations, contributed to anti-colonial success. The quest of the Spanish American colonists to achieve independence was also greatly facilitated by the weakening of Spain produced by Napoleon's invasion and occupation of the Iberian peninsula.

The United States also contributed to the anti-imperial movement in this era with the promulgation of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823.[22] This doctrine declared the illegitimacy of any attempt to re-colonize the Americas, even though the United States lacked the naval and military

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[20] For diplomatic history on the U.S. role: Whitaker, 1941; Griffin, 1937. For more general treatments: Haring, 1947; Langley, 1996. For Spain's American empire and its fate: McCoy, Fradera, and Jacobson, 2012.

[21] Balaunde, 1938; Rodriguez, 1998; Billias, 2009.

[22] Classic diplomatic history accounts are: Perkins, 1927; May, 1975. The Monroe Doctrine was a topic of interest among German theorists, such as Karl Haushofer and Carl Schmitt, who saw American "great space" hemispheric domination as a model they hoped Germany could emulate. Ulmen, 1987.

capacity to impede the re-conquest of the new Spanish American republics by the Spanish

monarchy that was restored at the Congress of Vienna. Many historians discount the importance

of the Monroe Doctrine, instead attributing the continued independence of the Latin American

republics to the British navy and the unwillingness of Britain to allow further French or Spanish

imperialism in the Americas. This explanation, however, is undermined by the French invasion

and occupation of Mexico in the 1860's, during the American Civil War, an effort which Britain

did nothing to impede. But in 1866, after the victory of the government of the United States over

its rebellious Southern states, the puppet government in Mexico City headed by the Austrian

Archduke Maximilian was overthrown by the Mexicans with American political and military

aid.[23]

2) The Limits of American Regional Imperialism

Those who view the United States as an imperial state focus not just on the contemporary

global reach of American power, but also on the expansion of the United States across

continental North American in the first half of the 19th century at the expense of native peoples

and Mexico, imperial activities in the Caribbean in the later 19th century, and particularly the

Spanish-American War of 1898.

The expansion of the United States across the middle latitudes of the North American

continent was rapid and complete. This expansion was certainly imperialistic and colonial in

regard to the indigenous American population, whose small numbers, military and technological

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[23] The literature on this episode, arguably the most clear-cut and consequential application of the

Monroe Doctrine, is quite thin, and it is mentioned mainly in passing in general accounts of U.S.

foreign policy. For accounts: Cook, 1974; Case and Spencer, 1970.

weakness, and political fragmentation posed little serious resistance to American expansion. This expansion paralleled the expansion of other great powers in the late 19th century. Britain expanded across Canada and Australia and into Africa. Russia expanded across Siberia to the Pacific and into Central Asia.[24] Qing China expanded into Central Asia and Manchuria.[25] All these expansions occurred against indigenous peoples with little military capacity. But the American expansion was different because it brought in its wake rapid settlement, which did not happen in the other cases due to the presence of relatively populous indigenous peoples, most notably in Africa, and inhospitable geographic conditions in the interior of Asia, Africa, Canada, and Australia.[26] These 19th century expansions into the continental interiors were classic peripheral expansions that were largely not impeded by the balancing efforts of other states.

Thus American continental expansion, while imperial, did not produce an empire, and the settlers that streamed westward across the steppe and mountains of the middle latitudes of North

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[24] For the full sweep of Russia's interaction with the international system: Lieven, 2001; LeDonne, 1997. For accounts of Russian expansion to its south and east: Khodarkovsky, 2002; Marks, 1991.

[25] For historical accounts: Purdue, 2005; Wakeman, Jr, 1985.

[26] Unlike the "second wave" expansion of European states that was occurring on other continents across oceans, both American and Russian expansion was territorially contiguous. The great British geographer and 'geopolitican,' Halford Mackinder, famously anticipated the rapid development of the interior of what he dubbed the "World Island," and its basis for an "empire of the world" in Mackinder, 1919, and this argument found a ready audience in Cold War America. But unlike American expansion, Russian expansion was into areas that were inhospitable to agriculture and extensive settlement, documented at length by several geographers seeking to dispel the hold of Mackinder's warning. Parker, 1972; Wesson, 1974; Cressey, 1962.

America showed little inclination to break away and establish their own states. In large measure this was because these settlers strongly identified themselves as Americans, and because they enjoyed political representation in the American federal-union.[27] While British settlers in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and enclaves in Southern Africa, also saw themselves as members of the British nation, the numerous and widely discussed schemes to federally incorporate these far-flung settler colonials were never seriously attempted, and were probably infeasible due to the unitary nature of the British state, the great distances between the colonies and the British Isles, and the great divergences of interests that sprung from their distant locations and circumstances.[28] The American expansion was also different because large parts of the territories were acquired through purchase, most notably of Louisiana from France in 1803, which doubled the size of the United States, and then of Alaska from Russia in 1867.[29]

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[27] In his influential lectures of 1884, the British historian J.R. Seeley argued that the United States was a novel political formation, in combining republican self-rule and large size (previously only associated with oppressive empires) and pointed to the pivotal importance of the Northwest Ordnance of 1787, which provided for the admission of new states into the union and their equality with the original states Among the large literature on this topic: Meinig, 1993. Bender, 2006, p. 105. For its role in the American founding: Onuf, 1987.

[28] For the geographic limits to such schemes: Deudney, 2001. For an intellectual history: Bell, 2007.

[29] The transfer of large territories by purchase, rather than conquest, was common in American expansion, but not much explored in international relations theory. For one recent exception: Elman, 2004.

The annexation of Texas and the Mexican War of 1846-48 loom large in the narrative of American imperial expansion, but also reveal its limits. These events underscore the great relative power of the United States relative to neighboring European settler-colonies in the Americas, the strength of American opponents of imperialism in slowing and limiting expansion, and the imperialist tendencies of the Southern 'slavocracy' that rejected core American regime principles. When Mexico became independent from Spain, it inherited Spanish claims to the vast, largely arid, and sparsely populated area that stretched far into western North America. In an effort to stimulate economic development, Mexico invited American settlers into Texas, and Americans, mainly from the neighboring Southern states, streamed into eastern Texas, bringing with them their slaves, despite the recent abolition of slavery in Mexico. The settlers successfully rebelled against Mexico, without assistance from the United States government, and then sought admission to the Union, but, thwarted from joining by Northern opposition to the extension of slavery, Texas remained an independent, and internationally recognized, state for nearly a decade. In 1844, James K. Polk, a slave-owning protégé of Andrew Jackson, was elected president in one of the closet elections in American history,[30] and he quickly precipitated a war with Mexico in which two small American armies quickly seized northern Mexico and then Mexico City itself. Polk's plan to annex all or most of Mexico was thwarted by his emissary's refusal to demand such extensive cessions, and Polk was only able to win Senate ratification of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo by the slimmest margins due to the vociferous Northern opposition to the expansion of slavery and expansion by conquest. Thus, even in this most extreme case of American imperial expansion in the 19th century, it is striking how little of

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[30] Ironically, Polk's Whig rival and opponent of annexation, lost New York, and thus the election, by fewer votes than were cast for a small early pro-abolitiontist party.

Mexico was taken, given America's power potential, and how slow and conflicted this expansion was.

As the United States' population rapidly grew, and the industrialization of the United States advanced, the relative power position between the United States and all other actors within the New World greatly changed. By the late 19th century, the United States had the world's largest economy, and was one of the leaders in technological and organizational innovation. Among the handful of other large and powerful states with the potential to play roles as great powers on the global stage, the United States had decided advantages over each of the others. Given this great American power, what is distinctive, indeed remarkable, about American foreign policy within the Americas was how many opportunities there were for American expansion that did not actually occur.[31] Cuba, despite the aspirations of many Cubans and some Americans, remained outside the American Union, in part because of the unwillingness of most Americans to annex a people who were so different in their political institutions and ethnic and racial composition. It is also notable that the remaining British colonies to the north of the United States, consolidated after 1867 into the Canadian federation, were not subject to American aggression and annexation, despite the fact that Canada, while larger than the United States, had less than a tenth of the American population, and had an essentially indefensible three thousand mile border with its neighboring colossus. And the aspirations of some Americans for expansion into the Caribbean and Central America were repeatedly thwarted by the checks and balances of the American federal government, which made opposition easy and action difficult.[32]

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[31] For how American domestic factors impeded expansion during this period: Meiser, 2015.

[32] Also of note in the American relationship with its weak neighbors to the south is the return of the Panama Canal to Panama in 1978, a transfer of a strategically and economically valuable asset not typically made by imperial states.

One episode of extra-continental American imperialism – the Spanish-American War – looms large in many of the narratives of America as fundamentally imperialist.[33] This short, and militarily one-sided, war with Spain was followed by American occupation of several long-time Spanish colonies in the Caribbean, as well as the Philippine Islands, located on the far side of the Pacific. This war is, however, in many ways the exception that proves the general rule. The case for war by its advocates was strengthened by the sensational catastrophic explosion of the U.S. battleship *Maine* in Havana harbor (an event widely attributed to sabotage, but later found by the U.S. Navy to have been caused by the ignition of coal dust in the ship), reports of widespread human rights abuses by Spain against Cubans, and a desire to further the elimination of European colonial rule in the Americas.[34] United States stopped short of actually annexing Cuba, and demonstrated little willingness to incorporate the Philippines into the American Union.[35] This war was also extremely controversial in the United States, and there was extensive domestic opposition to it. Critics opposed the war and any long-term imperial rule, typical for European

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[33] For overall accounts of the period: May, 1961; LaFeber, 1993. For the scope of the American debate: Hendrickson, 2009.

[34] For a chronology of these events: Perez, 1998.

[35] The American occupation of the Philippine Islands and its efforts, often brutal, to suppress local rebellion, looms large in accounts of imperialism and racism as major influences of U.S. foreign policy: Karnow, 1989; Miller, 19xx; Kramer, 2006. The United States in 1934 promised that the Philippines would become independent in 1946, and in part due to this commitment Filipinos fought with the Americans to eject the invading Japanese in the second world war, unlike the native elites and populations in the British, French and Dutch colonies elsewhere in Asia.

and Asian great powers, because of its fundamental incompatibility with American liberal democratic regime principles.[36] Also, part of the rationale for this war was the prospect that other stronger European states, most notably Germany, were poised to annex the far-flung pieces of the militarily weak Spanish empire.[37] The appeal of annexation to preclude annexations by others was particularly evident in the American acquisition of the Hawaiian islands. Due to their position in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, and the extraordinarily fine harbor they possessed, this small archipelago was inevitably relevant to the defense of the Pacific coast of the United States, and another imperial state would surely have seized them had the United States not done so. Overall, what is striking about the United States as an imperial power is how different it was from other imperial states in the late 19th century, first in the ease and completeness of its absorption of the interiors of North America, and then in the limited and half-hearted scope of its expansion elsewhere in North America, and elsewhere in the global system.

3) Thwarting Third Wave Empires: The Two World Wars

During the early 20th century, as the new military capabilities provided by the industrial revolution were coming into widespread use, the international system was convulsed by two global wars, World War I and World War II, that were unprecedented in their scope and destructiveness. While the far-reaching impacts of these wars has been widely recognized, the fact that these wars saw the defeat of very aggressive imperial and colonial projects, from Germany, Italy and Japan, seldom registers as the great anti-imperial and anti-colonial efforts that they actually were. In the first of these wars, which was primarily in Europe, Germany was able conquer a large area in Eastern Europe and seize from the Russian empire large parts of its

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[36] For accounts of this opposition and its influence: Beisner, 1968; Tompkins, 1970.

[37] For the long history of great power rivalry in the Caribbean: Langley, 1976.

western territories.[38] Despite this great success in the east, Germany was ultimately defeated by an alliance of Britain and France, that was joined late in the war by the United States. This war resulted in the collapse of four long-established European empires in central Europe and western Asia: Romanov Russia, Hapsburg Austria-Hungary, Hollenzollen Germany, and Ottoman Turkey. In the wake of these imperial collapses, the Western allies at the conference of Versailles recognized an array of newly independent nation-states. Some, such as Poland and the Baltic states, had once enjoyed independence, but had lost it to imperial advances by their neighbors. Others, such as Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, appeared as states for the first time.

The United States played an important role in the allied victory over the Central Powers in 1918. At the 1919 Versailles conference, the United States played an even more important role in shifting the architecture of the settlement toward anti-imperial principles of national self-determination.[39] While Britain and France continued to view empires as legitimate and sought to advance their own imperial interests, the United States, under the leadership of Woodrow Wilson, was instrumental in pushing the settlement closer to universalizing Westphalian principles of national self-determination. Although the settlement took important strides in this direction, it was incomplete and marred by inconsistent application of these principles, not just

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[38] For the imperial and colonial aims of Germany in World War I: Fischer, 1961; Fischer, 1965. For a particular penetrating discussion of Germany's expansionist efforts: Calleo, 1978.

[39] For the American role: Ikenberry, 2001. On Wilson's evolving thinking about the principles and institutions of postwar order: Cooper, 2001; Levin,1970; Knock,1995; MacMillan, 2002.

because of the interests of the European imperial states, but also because of the Eurocentric and racial attitudes of Wilson and other allied leaders.[40]

The second phase of these conflicts in World War II was even more violent and more completely global in scope.[41] This global war was triggered by the aggression of Italy, Japan, and Germany, each with ambitions to create extensive empires through military conquest. At its high water mark in 1942, Japan had conquered a vast domain in East Asia and the Pacific, displacing British, French, Dutch, and American (in the Philippines) possessions, as well as large parts of China.[42] In western Eurasia, the German Third Reich, at its high tide in 1942, had conquered almost all of continental Europe, North Africa, and most of European Russia. The Nazi German regime had also rapidly begun to implement its ghastly genocidal plans to eliminate populations to clear *lebensraum* for German colonization.[43] These vast German

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[40] The first American President from the South elected since the Civil War, Wilson's attitudes toward race were on the more retrograde end of the spectrum of American racial attitudes during this period. On Wilson and race: Gerstle, 2008 and essays on Wilson in Cooper, Jr. and Knock, 2010. For the influence of racism on the Versailles settlement: Manela, 2007; Mayer, 1969.

[41] For the primary responsibility of Hitler in initiating the war, and the interconnections between its Pacific and European "theaters": Weinberg, 1994.

[42] For Japan's overseas empire, initiated with the defeat of China in 1895 and the occupation of the Koran peninsula in 1911, and then greatly expanded in the 1930s and 1940s: Myers and Peattie, 1984. For its conquest and rule in China and elsewhere: Duus, Myers, and Peattie, 1996.

[43] For the importance of conquest for colonization in Hitler's thinking, and thus German grand strategy: Smith, 1986; Rich, 1973. For links to larger social-biological and population theories:

conquests were at the expense of numerous previously independent nation-states. Had the Axis

empires not been defeated and dismembered, the international system would have been

dominated by three massive empires in Eurasia, confining the Westphalian world primarily to the

Western Hemisphere.

As in the first world war, America initially remained aloof from the conflict, only

joining in response to direct aggression from the axis powers.[44] But the United States in this

conflict played a much more decisive role in mobilizing the resources and deploying the armies

and navies that defeated the axis powers. In this conflict, the United States was the "arsenal of

democracy," and played the balancer role, doing so on a global scale what Great Britain had

done in earlier centuries in European wars. Its distance from the core states shielded it from full

blown attacks from the military forces of the expansive core states on the east and west ends of

Bashford, 2014. For the diverse ways in which the Nazi imperium was ruled and exploited:

Mazower, 2008.

[44] The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, followed by Hitler's declaration of war on the United

States, ended the contentious American debate about involvement in the war. Even before this

event, American strategic thinking increasingly saw American security as dependent on access to

the "old world," in part due to the growing realization that the 'western hemisphere' was not a

viable defensive perimeter, an argument forcefully made by Spykman, 1942. For debates within

the American foreign policy establishment: Santoro, 1992. Extensive German activity in the

Americas, discussed in Frye, 1967, also played a role in this American reorientation. For

discussion: Haglund, 1984; Whitaker, 1954, 1965. For Marxist geographer Neil Smith on the

influential State Department geographer Isaiah Bowman advocacy of American expansion:

Smith, 2003.

the Eurasian "world island." Thrown into alliance by their common mortal enemy, the Soviet Union, Britain, and the United States formed a grand anti-imperial coalition that called itself the United Nations, thus underscoring the extent to which the allied war aims sought to restore the independence of occupied and threatened nations. In the Atlantic Charter of 1941 the United States and Britain articulated a vision of a postwar order, but the Americans preferred stronger support for national self-determination and the opening of exclusive imperial economic zones.[45] In the wake of this war, the United States played a decisive leadership role in the founding the United Nations Organization and the drafting of its Charter.[46] Despite the aspirations of some for an autonomous international organization with the capabilities to enforce the peace, the Charter was much more an institutionalization of the Westphalian system because it enshrined national sovereignty and self-determination as the foundational principles of international order. Like earlier less institutionalized versions of the Westphalian system, the Charter recognized the inequality of power among its members, and institutionalized the special rights and responsibilities of the great powers as permanent and veto-bearing members of its Security Council. The UNO was not a proto-world government, but instead was a framework through which the most powerful states could cooperate to maintain international peace and security. These efforts to institutionalize and reform the Westphalian state system were driven by the widespread realization that the destructiveness of modern industrial war had grown to such an extent that the maintenance of peace was necessary for the security and survival of states to a

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[45] For accounts of the Atlantic Charter meeting: Brinkley and Facey-Crowther, 1994; Wilson, 1969. For an account of the clash of British and American agendas regarding anti-imperialism that emphasizes FDR's skill in outmaneuvering Churchill: Hamilton, 2014.

[46] For the pivotal U.S. role: Kennedy, 2006; Schlesinger, 2003; Russell, 1958.

vastly greater extent than in previous eras.   With the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, core liberal democratic principles of human rights were enshrined into international law, which previously had almost exclusively specified the rights of states. These new features of world public law and organization embodied political principles which the United States had played a major historical role in developing and promulgating.

Finally, America's relations with China in the wake of second and third wave empire building illuminate these larger patterns. China, across its long history was – like other great powers – significantly imperial and colonial. However, in the 19th and early 20th century, China was primarily a victim of empire and imperialism, by the Europeans and most aggressively by its Asian neighbor, imperial Japan. Throughout the period of European encroachment in East Asia, the United States generally opposed territorial concessions and spheres of influence in China. Instead, the United States supported an "open door" for trade – a forerunner to later American ideas about open and multilateral trade.[47] In the 1930s and 1940s, the United States opposed Japanese imperial aggression in China and elsewhere in Asia, leading the United States to first place an embargo on Japan and then wage a costly war against it. China suffered horribly from Japanese depredations, but it was primarily the United States that defeated imperial Japan. Moreover, despite the relative weakness of China during and after the war, the Roosevelt administration insisted that China receive one of the five permanent seats on the UN Security Council.[48] More recently, since the 1970s, the United States has supported the Chinese opening to the world, including participating in the WTO and other global bodies, and mostly welcomed Chinese trade and growth. Overall, China has by-and-large benefitted from the emergence of the

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[47] Cohen, 2010, Fifth ed.

[48] For accounts of Sino-American relations: Christensen, 1996; Foot, 1997; Gittings, 1974.

United States as a great power, its opposition to second and third wave imperialism, and the postwar liberal international order.[49]

4) Thwarting Fourth Wave Empires: The Soviet Union and International Communism

The next, and arguably most important, American contribution to the anti-imperial cause was the leading role that the United States played in resisting the expansion of the Soviet Union and international communism.[50] The second world war resulted in the complete destruction of the Japanese, German, and Italian imperial projects, but it improved the military and political position of another empire, that of the Soviet Union.[51] In the struggle to thwart Soviet imperial ambitions, the United States played the pivotal role, as leader of a system of alliances stretching in a long arc along the Eurasian periphery that was threatened by Soviet power, and also as the primary promoter of liberal democratic capitalism as an alternative to communism. The Soviet

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[49] For aspects of this view: Iriye, 1967.

[50] Most of the enormous body of literature on this conflict focuses on its character as a great power conflict, or its ideological dimensions, and is rarely incorporated in studies of empires. Gaddis, 1997, speaks of a clash of "empires" in Europe and Asia. See ch.2 and 3.

[51] Unlike the particularistic and often radically anti-universal ideologies animating earlier waves of modern empire builders, communist ideology was militantly universal in its ambitions, aiming for nothing less than an eventual communist "one world." For Soviet thought on how the world would be organized after complete communist global victory, see Goodman, 1960. But like the mass murder practices of Nazi German imperialism, the communist movement repeatedly demonstrated its willingness to dispossess, coerce, and kill large numbers of people. The most authoritative body count, at 120 million deaths, is provided in Courtois, 1999.

Union not only inherited the Russian empire with its numerous subjected nations and groups, but as the result of the advance of its armies into the center of Europe in 1945, it had brought Eastern Europe under its direct domination. The states that the Soviet Union dominated in Eastern Europe, such as Poland, were nominally independent but were very tightly controlled by the Soviet Union through the communist parties that the Soviet Union put into power with military force, and by the permanent presence of large Soviet armies. The imperial nature of the relationship between the Soviet Union and these nominally independent East European states was unmistakably revealed when the Soviet Union used its overwhelming military power to crush rebellions, and even reform movements, in Poland in 1953, Hungary in 1956, and Czechoslovakia in 1967. The Warsaw Pact, the Soviet-dominated alliance that included its Eastern European "satellites" was both a threat to countries beyond the East-West divide, and an instrument for the maintenance of Soviet control over its often restive "allies."

Starting in the late 1940s, the United States organized a global alliance system to contain Soviet power. Although dozens of countries in these alliances in Europe, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and East Asia contributed significantly, the United States provided the decisive military capabilities to thwart Soviet expansion. This required the United States to maintain high levels of defense expenditure, to reorganize the American government on a permanent war footing, and to deploy military forces in a network of bases around the world. The United States came to be the major military power in the long arc stretching from Norway to Japan because of World War II, but it continued its presence because of the threat of the Soviet Union and its allies. The American presence was thus "by invitation," and as such fundamentally different

from the Soviet presence outside its borders. The United States was thus an "empire" in its size and power, but not in its terms of domination.[52]

5) Dismantling Second Wave European Empires and the Soviet Empire

In the second half of the 20th century, the United States also contributed in important ways to the dismantlement of empire and the spread of independent Westphalian nation states. Between 1945 and 1965, nearly all the colonized peoples in the European empires achieved political independence. In the wake of the second world war, the United States played an important role in helping to dismantle the British, French, and Dutch overseas empires that had been begun in the 18th century but greatly expanded in the late 19th and early 20th century.[53] As in the first wave of imperial disintegration in the late 18th and early 19th century, war among the core states in the European states – in this case, the world wars – greatly weakened the core European colonial states, and provided a decisive push toward de-colonization. Colonial peoples, particularly in Africa and South Asia, had been mobilized extensively in the allied war effort, thus taking them a step toward self-rule. The legitimacy of the European colonial empires

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[52] This expression comes from Lundestad, 1990. For extensive exploration of the American system, its logics, and differences with "empire": Ikenberry, 2011. For a core-periphery view of this system and the global system: Goldgeier and MacFaul, 1992. Indicators for the difference between the US presence in the former colonial world in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and an "imperial presence" is that the U.S. leaves its bases when asked by the host country, as occurred in the Philippines in the wake of the democratic transition there, and the fact that the U.S. pays, often substantial sums, for basing rights. Cooley, 2008.

[53] Fieldhouse, 1967; Darwin, 1988; Thomas, Moore, Butler, 2008.

had also been eroded by the war aims of the allied powers and the elevation of the principle of national self-determination as the basic principle of international order. Many non-European elites in the European empires had been educated in the metropolitan countries where they were exposed to liberal democratic as well as communist ideas, both fundamentally subversive of the types of colonialism and imperialism that the Europeans practiced. Taken in combination, these developments profoundly weakened the underpinnings of the European colonial empires.

In the demise of the European empires, the United States played an important supporting, but probably not a centrally decisive role.[54] The American contribution primarily took the form of pressure on the European colonial powers to accept the inevitability of the end of their empires and the futility of armed resistance to them. In the wake of the devastation of France and Britain by the war in Europe, these countries had hoped to revive their fortunes and improve their positions by reestablishing or maintaining their rule over large parts of Africa and Asia. But these countries were also heavily dependent on American aid to assist their recovery from the destruction of the war, and on American military power to restrain Soviet ambitions in Europe. This dependence and vulnerability provided the United States with leverage to push the Europeans to accept the dismantlement of their empires. The Dutch had lost control of Indonesia to the invading Japanese in 1942 and hoped to re-establish their rule after the defeat of Japan, but they were stymied in this effort by the United States.[55] The United States played an important role in the dismantlement of the British imperial preference system, a core part of the British

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[54] For accounts of de-colonization that examine the contribution of the United States: Louis, 1978; Louis, 1986, Newsom, 2001. For American critiques of British colonialism: Watt, 2008.

[55] McMahon, 1981.

imperial system, through leverage over Lend Lease and postwar financial assistance.[56] Although

the French empire was much smaller than the British, the French were much more determined to

hold on to their imperial possessions. But France was unable to maintain its rule in Sub-Saharan

western Africa in the face of determined colonial independence movements that were backed by

both the United States and the Soviet Union.

The United States opposed the continuation of European colonial rule, and it opposed the

expansion of communism, which the United States viewed as a new, and particularly dangerous,

imperialism. American efforts to end European empires were greatly complicated by the anti-

colonialism of the Soviet Union, and the communist orientation of many colonial independence

leaders. On the one hand, the international communist movement's vigorous support for

colonial national independence efforts created a strong incentive for the United States to also

support these efforts. On the other hand, the aim of some of these movements and their leaders

to establish communist regimes created incentives for the United States to resist some of these

efforts. The difficulties of finding a path through this dilemma underlay the two great conflicts

in French Indochina. Because the Vietnamese independence movement was dominated by

communists, the United States supported France in its costly and ultimately futile effort to

prevent the independence of French Indochina between 1949 to1954. In the Geneva Accords of

1954, Indochina was partitioned into four independent countries – Laos, Cambodia, a communist

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[56] For accounts of Washington's use of Lend Lease to pressure Britain to dismantle the Imperial

Preference System: Gardner, 1956; Hathaway, 1983; Woods, 1990; Kimball, 1994; Borgwardt,

2007.

North Vietnam, and a non-communist South Vietnam.[57] In the 1960s, the corrupt and widely

unpopular non-communist regime in the South was threatened by a communist rebellion aided

by the North Vietnam. Fearing the fall of South Vietnam, the United States fought a major war

to maintain the independence of South Vietnam from 1964 until the fall of Saigon in 1975.[58]

The difficulties of opposing communist take-overs, while at the same supporting de-

colonization and promoting democratic rule in the newly independent countries, vexed American

foreign policy decision-makers for a generation. The United States tended to view a communist

take-over of a country as both likely to be irreversible, and an augmentation of the power of the

Soviet coalition. As a result, the United States almost always supported authoritarian and

autocratic dictatorships, some of them highly repressive in many newly independent states.

However, in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the international communist

movement in the 1980s, the United States quickly removed its support for anti-communist but

oppressive dictators throughout the underdeveloped world and provided support for democratic

transitions.

Perhaps the greatest success of the American effort to dismantle empires and advance

national and democratic self-determination occurred in the late-1980s and early 1990s in Eastern

Europe and the Soviet Union itself. While the collapse of the Soviet Union and its rule in

Eastern Europe occurred both unexpectedly and suddenly, it seems clear that the United States

and its West European democratic allies played very important roles in this shift. The American-

led NATO alliance contained Soviet military threat and the success and ideological appeal of

liberal democratic capitalism undermined the communist system, in part by providing a model of

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[57] Statler, 2009; Logevall, 2012; Nguyen, 2012.
[58] Herring, 1985.

a system that was superior in both its economic performance and its ability to realize human rights and democratic accountability.[59]

6) Systemic Effects of Liberal Order

Another important and underappreciated way in which the United States has influenced the international system away from empire and toward the Westphalian system of sovereign states is through its pivotal role in creating and sustaining liberal aspects of the international order. The effort to build international institutions and arrangements to provide public goods, solve common problems, and provide an infrastructure for transactions is widely appreciated.[60] What is less appreciated are the ways in which these efforts strengthened the ability of weaker and smaller sovereign states to obtain a viability that they would otherwise lack.

Such a Westphalian supporting "system effect" can be seen the extensively promoted and institutionalized trading system. Trade institutions allow states to pursue highly developed relations, comparative advantage, and functional economic differentiation. In a state system without such institutions, states would be compelled to pursue much more self-sufficient and even autarkic economic strategies that would reduce their overall wellbeing and undercut the ability of small states to remain independent. Another system effect supporting and stabilizing the Westphalian system has resulted from the extended military alliance system. Without the pooling of resources and the security provided by these alliances, many states would simply be unable to sustain their independence against larger neighboring states. The proliferation of the

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[59] For other efforts to address this topic: Deudney and Ikenberry, 2011; Deudney and Ikenberry, 1991/92. For the effects of this struggle: Wested, 2005.

[60] Ikenberry, 2011.

number of states and indeed the breakup of states into smaller and smaller units is in part a consequence that small states do not have to provide their own security when they are enmeshed in the extended alliance systems which the United States played such a central role in providing.

Conclusions

History is always ambiguous, complex, and subject to dispute. Some facts loom larger for some observers than others, and there is no ultimately neutral position from which historical judgements can be made. As the most powerful and influential – and successful – state across the 20th century, questions about the American impact on the world loom particularly large in their importance while being particularly difficult to fully answer. Because of its outsized influence, the foreign policy of the United States has drawn criticisms from many directions, most all of which have at least some merit. Over the last several decades the idea that the United States has been, and remains, an essentially imperial state, devoted to the acquisition and maintenance of empire has been given wide airing, is held by large numbers of people, both inside, but particularly outside the United States. This view of the United States has also been developed in a large academic and historical literature that has challenged, in ways large and small, a more positive view of the American role and impact that was once widely, often uncritically, held by many Americans.

In this paper, we have laid out a very different view of the historical relationship between the United States and imperialism, colonialism and empire. Our main claim is that the United States has been far more anti-imperial than imperial, far more anti-colonial than colonial, and far more the enemy than the source of empire. Over the course of the quarter millennium of its existence, the United States has done more than any other state to thwart and dismantle empire.

This impact was in part intentional and in part an indirect effect of American great power balancing.

Many factors are at play in the decline of empire and the universalization of the Westphalian state system – the diffusion of military capacities, the rise of the international trade system, the rise of nationalism, and the spread of anti-colonial and human rights norms. This paper shows that the impact of the United States should be added to this short list of factors. Furthermore, these factors overlap and interact in complex ways, and sometimes the American impact enables and amplifies them. The diffusion of military capacities – part of a broader spread of modern and industrial technologies – was influential in the demise of empires by raising the cost of their creation and maintenance, but was less important than the military defeat of imperial great powers in wars with the United States, particularly in the third and fourth waves. The growth of trade reduces the incentives to acquire empires, but many trading networks were intra-imperial, and the United States played an often decisive role in advancing a more open, non-preferential trading order. Nationalism, an ideology closely connected with state-building within the Westphalian system, was a persistent enemy of empire from its inception and the emergence of the United States was the first anti-imperial national rebellion and a model for imperial resistance ever since. Similarly, anti-colonial and human rights norms, another set of 18th century innovations, have had a life extends far beyond he United States but the Unite States has done more by its practices and example to advance them than any other act in the late-modern era. In sum, these factors certainly existed and operated independently of the American impact, but they have been greatly amplified by the rise of the United States.

The new critical historiography of the United States as empire and its influence on the world as imperial rests of a simple fundamental category conflation, which is the concept of "the

West." It is certainly true that the United States has a wide array of civilizational and cultural inheritances from the historical European core of the West. But far more basic for understanding the changing role of empire and imperialism in world politics is the ways in which Europe and the United States differ. The "old West" of Europe has been across the centuries of the modern era primarily devoted to empire and imperialism, while America's rise has been largely at the expense of empire and colonialism. While the Westphalian system originated in Europe, European globalization was imperial and the universalization of the Westphalian system was made possible only by the decline of these empires.

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