PATTERNS of EMPIRE

The British and American Empires, 1688 to the Present

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Introduction

Empires in Comparison

> We covet no territory, and we have no imperialistic ambitions.
>
> – Sumner Welles, U.S. Secretary of State (1941)

> America has never been an empire. We may be the only great power in history that had the chance, and refused.
>
> – President George W. Bush (2000)

> Our nations covet no territory . . . only a safer world.
>
> – Donald Rumsfeld on the United States and Britain in Iraq (2003)

> America is not the crude stereotype of a self-interested empire. The United States has been one of the greatest sources of progress that the world has ever known. We were born out of revolution against an empire. We were founded upon the ideal that all are created equal, and we have shed blood and struggled for centuries to give meaning to those words – within our borders, and around the world.
>
> – President Barack H. Obama (2009)

These utterances by America's prominent statesmen represent a longstanding tradition of thought called "exceptionalism." According to this tradition of thought, the United States has always been different from other countries. Unlike European nations, it lacks a feudal past. Born of an anticolonial revolution against a monarchy, it clings interminably to egalitarian, democratic, and liberal ideals. Because of this unique history and national character, the United States has never been an empire, nor could it ever be. George W. Bush's claim that America is "the only great power in history that had the chance [to be an empire] and refused" is one expression among many of this exceptionalist theme. Traditional scholarship on American foreign policy has espoused the same idea, consciously avoiding terms like "imperialism" or "empire," and instead using terms like "diplomacy." "One of the central themes of American historiography," observed the historian William A. Williams in 1955, "is that there is no American empire."[1]

[1] Williams (1955).

One goal of this book is to critically reconsider these claims about exceptionalism. On what grounds can we say that the United States has been special, different, or "exceptional"? Can we rightfully assert that the United States has never been an empire? Is exceptionalism a useful way for thinking about America's past and present standing in the world?

In addressing these questions, this book will argue that exceptionalism obscures more than it reveals. As a set of claims about what is or is not, and as a mode of thought, exceptionalism should be rejected. Yet in making this case, the point is not simply to assert exceptionalism's opposite and declare that the United States is and always has been an empire. Such a declaration would not be new. Revisionist historians in the tradition of William A. Williams have already mounted assaults on exceptionalism by unearthing America's real imperial history. Highlighting America's westward expansion, its treatment of Native Americans, the acquisition of overseas colonies like the Philippines, and America's multiple military interventions around the world, these scholars and their successors have already shown us some of the ways in which the United States has been an empire. An additional line of scholarship, which we might think of as "neo-revisionist" scholarship has added further insights, scrutinizing not just America's imperial history, but also how that history has been erased in popular consciousness. According to this scholarship, attempts to deny empire are but predictable manifestations of an "historical amnesia" – a "denial and displacement" of America's indisputable imperial history.[2] Therefore, if there's anything exceptional about America's empire at all, it is only that it is an "empire that dare not speak its name." As Niall Ferguson puts it, "the great thing about the American empire is that so many Americans disbelieve in its existence."[3] Denying empire is simply part of the unique *modus operandi* of American empire itself.

There remain those who still insist that the United States was never a proper "empire."[4] Still, the growing acceptance of revisionist histories means that critiquing exceptionalism by reiterating America's imperial past is not sufficient. Calling the United States an empire does not have the potency it might have once had.[5] In fact, despite the charges of neo-revisionists that America's empire is an empire in denial, popular discourse has become increasingly willing to call a spade a spade. The phrase "American empire" appeared in one thousand news stories over a single six-month period in 2003. During the early years of the Iraq War, the discourse continued, leading the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* to declare that "the concept of America as world empire, so controversial as to be almost unsayable just a few months ago, is now close to conventional

[2] See among others Jacobson (1999), Judis (2004), Kaplan (1993), Kaplan (2003a).
[3] Ferguson (2004).
[4] See Ravenal (2009) and Suri (2009).
[5] "The concept of American-as-imperium, a notion once employed only by scholars of a decidedly revisionist bent or by radical activists . . . has achieved a surprising amount of respectability of late." McMahon (2001), p. 82.

wisdom." Even officials have uttered the once unutterable. In 2003, a senior-level advisor to President George W. Bush stated: "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality."[6] Nor was this specific to the post-9/11 era. Earlier, in 2000, Richard Haas of the State Department urged Americans to "re-conceive their global role from one of a traditional nation-state to an imperial power."[7]

America's so-called amnesia and denial have abated. Apparently, the United States is not always an empire that dare not speak its name. For these reasons, a passionate declaration that there is an American empire would do little in itself to either critique exceptionalism or enrich our understanding of American power in the world. As the pundit Robert Kaplan wrote in the *Atlantic Monthly*, "It is a cliché these days to observe that the United States now possesses a global empire. . . . It is time to move beyond statements of the obvious."[8] I agree. A different approach is needed. Accordingly, this book raises and addresses new questions – the very questions invoked by the growing acceptance of revisionist thought. If the United States is and has always been an empire, does this mean that it is exactly the same as other empires? If it is not exactly the same, in what ways has it been distinct? If the United States is no longer an empire that "dare not speak its name," what remains of the notion of American distinctiveness, of something different or unique about America's global power? And what accounts for any similarities or differences we might find?

Revisionist historians have opened up these questions about America's similarity or difference with other empires by alerting us to America's long-standing and widespread imperial practices. But they have not yet answered them. These are *comparative* questions and, a few exceptions aside, comparative investigations of the U.S. empire are remarkably absent. This is a glaring omission. Conventional exceptionalist thought and revisionist criticisms all depend on comparison. To say that the United States is an "exception" is to say that it is an exception to a rule against which American distinctiveness can be measured. Similarly, to insist as revisionists do that the United States is and has always been an empire is to claim that it fits into the rule rather than deviates from it; that it is like or akin to something else. It is to suggest that the United States has exhibited features or enacted policies similar to those of other empires such that it is worthy of being called an empire in the first place. In other words, both exceptionalism and the revisionist critique are predicated on a silent and unstated understanding of other empires. They both depend on asserting an imperial "rule" or pattern against which American distinctiveness is to be measured or rejected. Their claims therefore conjure the need to look beyond the American empire, investigate other empires, and see how they fare in light of each other. Answering *any* questions about what is similar or different about

[6] Suskind (2004), p. 44.
[7] Quoted in Bacevich (2002), p. 219.
[8] Kaplan (2003b), p. 66.

the American empire demands a sustained systematic comparison that puts America's empire, both past and present, into a broader frame.[9]

Take, for instance, the British empire.

Turning to Britain

It is well known that Britain forged one of the largest and most powerful empires in the world over the course of the nineteenth century. This was an empire that reached down to Africa and back up to India, across to Hong Kong and down to Australia. Britain was also the world's preeminent military and economic power in the nineteenth century – sending its gunboats, money, and missionaries to do the Crown's bidding. An empire indeed. Still, not all Britons were always ready to utter the words "British empire." Historian Bernard Porter, among others, has shown that most Britons from the early to mid-nineteenth century were either ignorant of their empire or rejected the notion of it.[10] Instead, terms like imperialism and empire in the mid-nineteenth century were most often used to refer to Napoleonic France, not Victorian Britain. Even when it did refer to Victorian Britain, it did not mean empire as we might think of it today. It rather referred to "the United Kingdom of the British Isles and to England in particular." It was "rarely used in connection with topical issues of foreign affairs."[11] Only later, in the late decades of the nineteenth century, did more Britons became cognizant of the British empire and come to freely name it. It was only then, at that specific historical moment, when empire talk among Britons proliferated.

These British perceptions and discourses of empire in the nineteenth century are suggestive in various respects. First, they highlight that repressing, rejecting, or denying empire is not particular to the United States. Even people in the largest and most powerful empire of the time were not always quick to admit that they were part of an empire. In fact, some historians and statesmen have taken up the mantle of denial to suggest that a British empire never *really* existed.[12] Second, the Britons' discourse of empire shows a historical trajectory in imperial consciousness not unlike America's. Britons once denied empire but later began to recognize it, admit it, and talk more about it. This proliferation of empire talk among Britons in the late nineteenth century is akin to the proliferation of American empire talk among Americans in more recent years.

[9] Exceptions include Maier (2006) and Porter (2006). These works will be discussed throughout, along with how this book differs significantly from them. A good brief overview comparison between the U.S. and British empires can be found in Howe (2003), and a comparison of historiography can be found in MacDonald (2009). There is an older tradition of comparing British and U.S. imperialism (though this is different from a comparison of "empires"): These include Darby (1987), Liska (1978), Smith (1981), and Winks (1997).

[10] Porter (2004).

[11] Koebner and Schmidt (1964), pp. 145–6.

[12] See Powell (1969), p. 247. Also, historian John Darwin prefaces his recent work, *The Empire Project*, by saying "the British Empire in its heyday was largely a sham." See Darwin (2009), p. xi. Such claims obviously depend on what one means by the word "empire," an issue I take up throughout.

If Americans used to deny empire, they have done so less and less since the late twentieth century, just as Britons did in the late nineteenth century. In short, there has been similarity in empire talk and consciousness between Britain and the United States that would go undetected without an explicit comparative analysis. Without placing discourses of empire in comparative light, we would too easily and wrongly assume that denying empire is a distinctly American phenomenon.

The comparison in the present study is premised on the assumption that a systematic and sustained examination of other aspects of empire might likewise yield insights into matters of exceptionalism and empire. It might reveal similarities between America's and Britain's empire not just in discourse, but also in policies and practices. It might also help to unearth differences between the two empires and ultimately facilitate an *explanation* of whatever similarities or differences we might find.

This sustained comparison is what differentiates the present study from the revisionist historians' earlier work and from more recent examinations of U.S. imperialism. Although forthcoming chapters will indeed follow the revisionists' path and explore U.S. imperial history, the point is not to simply to catalog America's imperial interventions or therapeutically utter empire's name – as if that is all that is needed to attain a critical understanding. Rather, by employing a sustained systematic comparison, this book hopes to ascertain what, if anything at all, is distinctive, unique, or exceptional about American empire. It likewise aims to *explain* whatever differences or similarities arise from the comparison. Finally, this book seeks to raise some informed speculations about America's most recent imperial ventures in the early twenty-first century and where they might go. In 1902, the British critic and early theorist of imperialism J. A. Hobson wrote that "history devises reasons why the lessons of past empire do not apply to ours."[13] At that time, Hobson was criticizing his peers who believed that Britain had nothing to learn from the rise and fall of prior empires like Rome. In regard to the U.S. empire, we might similarly wonder what a consideration of Britain's imperial history has to say about America's imperial present and imperial future – if it has one at all.

First, though, our conceptual apparatus should be laid bare. A large part of what is at stake in our comparison is determining exactly *what it is* that we are comparing. So what exactly is an empire? What about related terms like imperialism or colonialism? After defining these terms, we can better establish the comparison and discuss the theoretical issues underlying it.

"Empire" and its Modalities

Defining terms like empire or imperialism is not a simple task. These terms carry heavy political and emotional baggage. To some, calling the United States an empire is to unfairly charge it with all kinds of wrongdoing and aggression. Another problem is that meanings shift over time. The word empire in the

[13] Hobson (1902), p. 234.

twentieth century might signify something different than in the eighteenth. To confuse matters even more, scholars sometimes stretch the terms for their theoretical (or political) purposes. V. I. Lenin defined imperialism as a stage of capitalism. Negri and Hardt conceptualize empire as multifaceted abstract relations of power that encompass the globe. Others have spoken of "cultural imperialism" or "economic imperialism."[14]

Definitions cannot be wrong or right. They can only be useful or not. Accordingly, for the purposes of our analysis, this book offers non-normative definitions that begin with elementary points. The goal is not to hurl accusations. Nor is it to narrow the investigation. The goal is offer a conceptual apparatus that can guide our investigation; to mark out some basic conceptual terrain. The trick is to define our terms widely enough so as to be flexible to the reality of history but narrow enough to be analytically robust.

To begin, *power* must be included in the definition. Empires, in their most basic sense, are sociopolitical formations that are constructed and maintained through the exercise of political power. This is not an arbitrary starting point. The word *empire* derives from the Latin term *imperium*, which roughly translates as "sovereignty" or "rule." During Roman times, *imperium* denoted the capacity to wage war and make laws, thereby describing a sphere of authority.[15] Later, during the early modern period in Europe, the term *imperium* took on added layers of meaning. Some usages rendered empire more or less synonymous with *status* or state. Other usages referred to an emperor or central political authority ruling over a distinct if not distant set of territories.[16] When Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, invaded Lorraine in the fifteenth century, he referred to himself as "Emperor and Augustus" because he had come to rule over two territories rather than one. Empire meant a diversity of territory under a single authority.[17] Later, in 1625, Charles I probably meant something similar when he declared Virginia and New England to be part of "our Royal Empire."[18] In all these instances, at the heart of the meaning of empire was political power.

Most scholars today build on this basic notion of empire. On the one hand, scholars have included various dimensions of empire beyond political power: economic, cultural, religious, and even psychological.[19] On the other hand, despite these possible multiple dimensions, most scholars would recognize political power as the definitive feature. This is not because political power is most important. Some might say the economy determines everything in the last instance. Yet without the exercise of political power, there is no empire. "Power," writes the historian Dominic Lieven, "in its many manifestations is

[14] Lenin (1939); Hardt and Negri (2001).
[15] Howe (2002), p. 13; Pagden (1995), p. 12.
[16] Eisenstadt (1968), p. 41; Howe (2002), p. 13.
[17] Pagden (1995), p. 14.
[18] Quoted in ibid. p. 15.
[19] Michael Mann's discussion of America's "incoherent empire," for instance, counts four dimensions of power. See Mann (2003).

the core and essence of empire."[20] Sociologist S. N. Eisenstadt writes: "[T]he term 'empire' has normally been used to designate a political system encompassing wide, relatively centralized territories in which the center, as embodied both in the person of the emperor and in the central political institutions, constituted an autonomous entity."[21] Political scientist David Abernathy defines empire in "political terms as a relationship of domination and subordination. . . . The distinctive core feature is political control."[22] Empire, adds anthropologist Fernando Coronil, refers to "relatively large geopolitical formations that establish domination by hierarchically differentiating populations across transregional boundaries."[23]

The concept of empire used in the present study follows from these basic definitions. At the risk of sounding overly schematic, this book defines empire as a sociopolitical formation wherein a central political authority (a king, a metropole, or imperial state) exercises unequal influence and power over the political (and in effect the sociopolitical) processes of a subordinate society, peoples, or space. "A kind of basic, consensus definition," Stephen Howe fruitfully summarizes, "would be that an empire is a large political body which rules over territories outside its original political borders. It has a central power or core territory – whose inhabitants usually continue to form the dominant ethnic or national group in the entire system – and extensive periphery of dominated areas."[24] Other terms used in this book follow accordingly. Empires are involved in *imperialism*, which is the process by which they are established, extended, or maintained. They often have *imperial policies*, which are official and stated plans and practices by which power is exercised.[25] And they formulate various *strategie*s and deploy multiple *tactics*, *techniques*, or *modalities* – sometimes unstated or unofficial – to realize their policies and extend or sustain themselves.

Keeping these basic definitions in mind is crucial for analytically differentiating empire and imperialism from other phenomena. First, empire is not the same thing as *economic* power. If a private corporation from a country invests in a weaker country and influences its internal affairs, we might call this "economic imperialism." But in the conceptual apparatus here proposed, this is different from the imperialism of a government. Empire entails political exertions of power by a state. Although such exertions might accompany or support a private corporation's economic exploitation, empire implies that a state is the main agent, and that the state directs, manipulates, or decisively influences the political – rather than just economic – processes and policies of a weaker society. Empire is a sociopolitical relation, not just an economic

[20] Lieven (2005), p. 128.
[21] Eisenstadt (1968)p. 41.
[22] Abernathy (2000), p. 19.
[23] Coronil (2007), p. 243. See also Tilly (1997), p. 3 and Doyle (1986), p. 19.
[24] Howe (2002), p. 14.
[25] Thornton (1978), p. 3.

one (even though the political operations of empire might entail economic relations).

Empire must also be differentiated from a "great power." A great power is a state with massive military capabilities and/or extensive territory. But such a state would only be an imperial state if the state uses those capabilities to exert influence on other peoples or societies to incorporate them as dependent satellites. A state that has the greatest military in the world but does not use it to construct a hierarchy of power may not necessarily be an empire. The United States may have the greatest military power in the world. It may also cover extensive territory. However, if it does not hold colonial dependencies or does not exert power over other societies, it would not be an empire (this is why the scholar Dominic Lieven, for instance, does not consider the United States today to be an empire, at least in its internal affairs: The "American president does not rule without consent over vast conquered territories and their populations").[26] Of course, states with such internal capabilities, like the United States, often do use their power in imperialistic ways. A state may be a great power and empire at once. The point here is to analytically separate the two. The issue is not whether a state *has* power (like military strength) but *whether* and *how* that power is exercised.[27]

A related distinction is between empire and "hegemony." The concept of hegemony first arose from Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci to refer to a cultural or ideological process, but many scholars who deploy it today often define it as an economic matter. In this conceptualization, a hegemon is a state that enjoys relative preponderance over the world economy. A state enjoys hegemony when it takes up the largest shares of the world's economic activity (measured by relative share of world GDP, for example).[28] Accordingly, hegemony and empire are not the same. A state can have an empire but not dominate the world economy. Similarly, a state can dominate the world economy without being an empire. Moreover, if we define hegemony as cultural influence, this would not be the same as empire either. We might speak of "cultural imperialism" as a modality of imperial power, but we would not define empire as a state that only wields cultural influence.[29] Hollywood may dominate the global film industry, and its values or meanings may indirectly influence peripheral societies, but if the U.S. government does not meddle in the affairs of weaker countries and aim to control their affairs, the United States would not be an empire in our strict sense of the term.

[26] Lieven (2002), p. 79.

[27] Kennedy (1987: 539) defines "great powers" as any "state capable of holding its own against any other nation," a status that in turn depends on the states' relative economic capacities. This is not the same thing as empires and Kennedy states from the outset that his book is not about empires (p. xxi).

[28] This definition derives from world-systems theory, see Arrighi, Silver, and Ahmad (1999), pp. 26–8; Boswell (1995), pp. 2–4; Wallerstein (2002b). There are other ways to define hegemony of course, but for this book's purposes the economic definition will be used.

[29] On "world leaders," see Modelski (1978), Modelski and Thompson (1996).

Empire is analytically distinguishable from great powers, hegemons, and cultural influence, and there is also wide variation across types or forms of empires. Sociological variations are noteworthy. Typically, empires entail internal diversity, with a dominant group residing at the apex of a sociopolitical hierarchy. Perhaps the most common hierarchy is racialized: One race monopolizes political power to rule over other races who reside in the empire's subordinated areas. This is the image typically invoked when one thinks of European colonial empires in Africa during the late nineteenth century. Yet in our conceptualization, an imperial hierarchy need not be racial. It could be ethnic, linguistic, or religious. In the early modern Spanish empire in the Americas, natives subject to Spanish rule were not always conceived as racially different and inferior in the strict phenotypical sense. They were seen as non-Christians, that is, "pagans."[30] Difference was marked here as religious rather than as a matter of biology, blood, or stock. Another example might be the Ottoman empire, which articulated religion with dynasty such that Islam and the Ottoman family ruled Kurd or Turk elites.[31] The Tsarist Russian empire was not even ethnically or religiously differentiated, but class-based.[32]

Another variation arises in *how* political influence is exercised. At stake here are the forms or modalities of imperial power. One common distinction is between *formal* (direct) and *informal* (or indirect) exercises of power. The first, formal imperialism, refers to direct territorial rule. The imperial state annexes foreign land, declares official control over it, and subordinates the local population. The controlled territory then becomes a *colony* or dependency. This dependency is part of the metropolitan state, but its inhabitants do not enjoy the same rights or privileges as the state's citizens. Formal empire is thus the same as *colonial empires* involving the annexation of territory and direct rule over it.[33] This type of empire is often, although not exclusively, obtained by military conquest. During the Roman period, most emperors were victorious military generals. However, direct formal control can also be established "by invitation" rather than conquest.[34] Or it can be established by unequal treaties, as was often the case with early Europeans and Native American tribes. In any case, this type of direct or colonial empire is usually what most people refer to when they speak of empire in popular discourse. It conjures the image of Spain and its colonies in the Americas, France and its possession of Algeria, or Britain and its rule over India or parts of Africa. Flags are raised. Governors are appointed. Policies for governing the natives are formulated and exercised. States are made.

Variations in formal empires follow. We might think of "settler colonialism," whereby the subordinated colony is dominated by emigrants from the

[30] Seed (1995).
[31] Barkey (2008).
[32] Lieven (2005), p. 139.
[33] On the concept "colonialism," see Fieldhouse and Emerson (1968) and Osterhammel (1999b).
[34] Howe (2002), p. 13.

home land; or "administrative colonialism," whereby a handful of officials from the home land rule over large native populations. D. K. Fieldhouse goes even further, distinguishing between (1) pure settlement colonies (the majority are settlers from the metropole); (2) mixed colonies (settlers live with a larger indigenous population); (3) plantation colonies (a small settler group managing estates for export); (4) occupation colonies (close to no settlers); and (5) trading settlements or naval bases (small areas of land run by a small group of temporary metropolitans).[35] We may think of other subtypes too, such as land-based as opposed to sea-based empires. Or we might order colonial empires chronologically, attending to differences between early modern empires like Spain's or Portugal's and the modern administrative colonial empires of the late nineteenth century established by Europe in Africa or parts of Asia. Even within any single empire, the legal or juridical status of territories and subjects can be variously named and differentially treated, creating a complex of juridically heterogeneous peripheries.

The overarching point is that formal empires involve direct political control over territory and the subjugation of inhabitants of that territory into a status that is lesser, inferior, or dependent. This is the "rule of colonial difference," as Partha Chatterjee (1993) has aptly named it.[36] By this measure of colonial rule, colonized peoples are treated as inferior to citizens in the metropole, both in practice and in juridical theory or official doctrine. Due to their perceived racial, ethnic, or some other kind of distinction, the colonized are not given the same rights and privileges as the colonizer or citizens in the colonizers' home country. In some ways, it is exactly this subjugated status that differentiates colonial empire from pure democratic nation-states or federal states.[37] Nation-states involve citizens. Empires involve *subjects*, not citizens, and the difference between them is an important marker of empire.[38] For Stoler, McGranahan, and Perdue (2007), it is an essential imperial characteristic: "Uncertain domains of jurisdiction and ad hoc exemptions from the law on the basis of race and cultural difference are guiding and defining imperial principles."[39]

Colonialism, as in formal empire, is only one modality of imperial power – one way of exerting influence over societies. There are others. Robinson and Gallagher (1953) famously chided British historians for thinking of the British empire only in terms of its colonies – those parts of the map painted red – when in fact Britain also exercised influence if not political power over societies that were not officially colonies.[40] Hence the notion of indirect or "informal" empire. This refers to the exercise of power over the internal or external affairs

35 Fieldhouse (1982), p. 11–13.
36 Chatterjee (1993).
37 Tilly (1997), p. 7.
38 As Cooper and Kumar have rightly argued in their own ways, nation-states and empires have not been historically opposed; but here I oppose them as ideal-types only. See Cooper (2005), pp. 153–203 and Kumar (2010).
39 Stoler, McGranahan, and Perdue (2007).
40 Robinson and Gallagher (1953).

military invasion. In contrast, financial aid, offering protection, or covert operations are more subtle and indirect; they are quieter, more silent, or hidden and thus involve less direct aggression than military invasion. Empires can thus shift between these modalities or tactics, substituting indirect tactics for direct ones, or vice-versa. Or they could mix and mingle them in different places, constituting a complex of strategies dispersed across sites. There are different ways to be imperial. It may be that this diversity contributes to the flexibility, and hence persistence, of empire over time and across different contexts.

In any case, we aim to be alert to these differences; to be aware of the multiplicity of imperial power; and to apprehend them in their possible combinations, shifts, substitutions, or transformations over time. It is for this reason – and due to this complexity and multiplicity – that we would fare well to think of empires not as essences but rather as *imperial formations*: sets of relations and forms involving multiple tactics, policies, practices, and modalities of power; hierarchically ordered formations wherein a state or center exercises control or unequal influence over subordinated territories, peoples, and societies through a variety of means and methods.[44] In this book, the word empire is used as shorthand for these complex formations of relations and practices.

The Task Ahead

The preceding discussion offers an admittedly rudimentary conceptual sketch. Yet it is nonetheless useful as a starting point. For example, with the foregoing definitions in mind, we might ask where and when political control is established and by what means. Formal or informal? We might also ask *why* formal control is established rather than informal, or vice-versa. Furthermore, we can investigate the empire as a whole at any given point in time – its formal territories and informal clients – and consider how the different parts are related or not. We might also consider the expansion or contraction of the imperial formation over time. In other words, we could examine the historical dynamics of empires, looking at moments when imperialistic activity is extended, stable, or retracted; or we could probe degrees of boldness and directness over time, looking for when imperial states become angry aggressors or when they shift to more subtle puppeteering from behind the scenes. Finally, the foregoing conceptual distinctions enable us to *compare* empires or imperial formations; to consider how the preferred strategies and forms are similar or different between the empires under scrutiny.

The main tasks of this book are guided by these conceptual distinctions and comparative questions. First, this book focuses foremost on the actions and operations of the *imperial state*. Although there are many actors involved in imperialism – from corporations to settlers, missionaries, and merchants – and although these actors will be discussed throughout, the primary focus here is the state: the institutional complex wielding resources deployed to establish

[44] On "imperial formations," see Stoler, McGranahan, and Perdue (2007).

and maintain its formal sovereignty or informal regimes. This follows from our conceptualization. As noted, empire at base is a matter of political power exerted by a ruling authority, a state. Therefore, an examination of empires can and should begin (but not necessarily end) with a focus on the imperial state. Accordingly, this book explores how the activities of the American state and British state constitute imperialism or not. It then discloses their imperial modalities and methods, policies and practices, and tactics and techniques. Chapters will also explore the activities of each state as they unfolded historically: how they might have expanded or contracted, how modalities in one era might have shifted in another, and the overall configuration of imperial power.

This book also puts imperial states into comparative perspective. To be clear, the comparison is not between British and American hegemony, nor is it about the United States and Britain as "great powers." It is not a comparison of how or why the two nations rose to hegemony; the policies that contributed to their socioeconomic development; or the factors that made them wealthy military powers. It is a comparative analysis of imperial formations. It is a comparison of how and why the two states have (or have not) exercised power over weaker societies, the forms that that exercise has taken, the modalities by which it has occurred, and the dynamics of imperialism over time. The comparison is precisely motivated. Following the implicit methodology of exceptionalist thought so as to better apprehend exceptionalism's operations and limits, the examination aims to illuminate differences and similarities between the two imperial formations. It looks at the modalities of the American imperial state in light of the British imperial state and vice-versa. It examines their respective transformations over time, comparing patterns of emergence, formation, or re-formation. In short, the comparative goal of this book is to better pinpoint what has been different about the American empire from the British empire.

The comparison is undoubtedly large. In taking on the task, this book admittedly runs the risk of overlooking certain complexities, details, and nuances. Multiple studies on these smaller aspects of empires have emerged: studies, for example, of the minute details of the lives of soldiers or settlers, merchants and housewives, travelers and slaves. This book does not purport to be of such caliber. Rather, in the tradition of comparative-historical sociology (and, by the same token, macrosociology and comparative history), it is unabashedly aimed at big comparisons. It looks for overarching patterns and dynamics and underlying forms and features that would otherwise go unnoticed amidst the trees. It is probably true that "empire is in the details" (as one anthropologist puts it), but this book ventures the risk that there might be overarching patterns, modalities, and iterative forms across time and space that warrant investigation too.[45]

[45] Lutz (2006). For representative work on the British empire that has paid close attention to the lives of everyday actors, see among others Colley (2003a). Much of this work constitutes new "cultural" or "social" histories of empire that also incorporate studies of gender, sexuality, and emotions. See for the U.S. context, among others, Stoler (2006), Tyrrell (1991b), and Hoganson

The final goal of this book is to *explain* whatever patterns we might find. Rather than only uncovering differences or similarities, this book hopes to account for them. What explains the fact that the U.S. empire has been this way or that way, as opposed to the British empire? Why did the U.S. imperial formation shift in one direction whereas the British formation shifted in the other? These are the sorts of questions that will be addressed as our analysis proceeds. We thereby weave between questions of *what* (What are the differences or similarities?) and *why* (Why the differences or similarities?). And on this matter we return to the issue with which we began: exceptionalism.

Explanation and Exceptionalism

Exceptionalism is relevant for our question of explanation because exceptionalism is more than just a description of the United States. It also has important implications for analyzing it. One implication is that any comparison between the United States and other countries is unfounded. As the United States is exceptional, comparisons to the British empire or any other empire would be misguided at best, misleading at worst. We would be better off rejecting the label empire and discarding "false analogies from a distant past."[46] The other implication has to do with explanation. As the United States has distinct values, cultural traditions, and institutions, whatever it does reflects those values, traditions, and institutions. In other words, America's exceptional history and behavior are caused by its exceptional internal characteristics.

This explanatory regime has been embedded in exceptionalist thought since it was first articulated by Alexis de Tocqueville (and by subsequent writers like Frederick Jackson Turner).[47] The basic theme is twofold. First, as Ian Tyrrell clarifies, American history "has been special and unique, standing as the only example of a true liberal democracy that the rest of the world would emulate."[48] Or as Kammen puts it, "the US has had a unique destiny and history . . . with highly distinctive features or an unusual trajectory."[49] Second, these unique features and trajectory have been caused by America's unique "national character." The United States exhibits special "traits" and "liberal, democratic, individualistic, and egalitarian values," and these traits or values

(2000). For macrocomparative studies of empire from which the present book draws inspiration, see Barkey (2008), Cooper and Burbank (2010), and Darwin (2008).

46 Motyl (2006). One historian recently argues that the "empire" label "obfuscates more than it explains," for it "asserts a core American similarity with historical empires that overrides too many fundamental differences." See Suri (2009), p. 524.

47 Exceptionalism, as a configuration of thought, has deeper roots. It originates in the discourse of early American settlers, politicians, and clergy who articulated the tenets of republicanism with the view that history is the unfolding of God's millennial plan. After these early stirrings, exceptionalism emerged as a more or less coherent framework influencing historical thinking and scholarship. See Ross (1984), pp. 910–11 and Madsen (1998) for good overviews.

48 Tyrrell (1991a), p. 1035.

49 Kammen (1993), p. 6.

account for America's unique features and trajectory.[50] The United States is the way it is (exceptional) because it has avoided the "class conflicts, revolutionary upheaval and authoritarian governments of 'Europe,'" and therefore has distinct values and beliefs that continue to shape it.[51] Social scientists in particular have drawn on these ideas to characterize various aspects of American history and explain features of American political development. Just as some historians claim that "America is a special case in the development of the West," so too do political scientists and sociologists insist that "American political institutions are more open, liberal, and democratic than those of any other major society," and that the American state exhibits "particularities as a liberal state" that cannot be described "as one would describe any other."[52] These social scientists then call on such particularities to understand such things as why the United States has been averse to Communism, why it is the richest country in the world, or why it is more litigious than, say, Canada.[53]

Exceptionalism in this sense has implications for thinking about and explaining empire. In exceptionalist narratives, America's unique values of democracy, liberty, and self-government have led the United States to be a distinctive global power, compelling the American state to behave differently than European powers: America's values and democratic institutions have meant that the United States never constructed an empire. Early expressions on this theme in the 1950s insisted that the United States eschewed empire because the United States was itself "a product . . . of revolt against colonial rule."[54] In the 1970s and 1980s, comparative historians argued that the United States since World War II has had various opportunities to seize colonies, but "deliberately rejected" the opportunities because the United States has been "obliged to conform to the principles which are the unalterable foundation of its political tradition."[55] A more recent commentary puts it simply: Empire is "not in America's DNA."[56]

In short, exceptionalism is not just a set of historical claims. It is a "way of talking about American history and culture," a "form of interpretation with its own language and logic."[57] This way of thinking is deeply entrenched in popular thought. In fact, even some revisionist scholarship critical of exceptionalism runs the risk of reproducing its tenets. As noted, revisionism has examined

[50] Huntington (1982), p. 13. Seymour Martin Lipset calls this an "American Creed" consisting of "liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism, and laissez-faire" that "reflect the absence of feudal structures, monarchies and aristocracies" [see Lipset (1996), p. 19].

[51] Tyrrell (1991a), p. 1035.

[52] Douglas (1995), p. 3; Huntington (1982), p. 14; Katznelson (2002), p. 84.

[53] The literature is voluminous, but for a recent exemplar, see Lipset (1996) and Shafer (1991). For exceptionalism and foreign policy see Lepgold and McKeown (1995), Ignatieff (1995), and Hoffman (1968). On exceptionalism and law see Koh (2003).

[54] Pratt (1958), p. 114.

[55] Schwabe (1986), p. 30; Liska (1978), p. 153.

[56] Hirsh (2002), p. 43.

[57] Madsen (1998), p. 2.

and reexamined America's global ambitions, its territorial and colonial expansion, and various aspects of American foreign policy that disclose imperial tendencies.[58] Whereas exceptionalism denies empire, this revisionist scholarship shows that empire has been an important feature of American history. Yet even this revisionist scholarship has not completely escaped exceptionalism's assumptions or explanatory models. This might seem odd, considering that the revisionist historians who inaugurated the study of American empire initially pitched their work *against* exceptionalism. Still, it remains the case that exceptional thought's mode of explanation remains a silent shaper of even revisionist thinking.

We can see this in two variants of revisionism. The first of these, which we might call "neo-revisionism" (or "liberal exceptionalism"), is seen in commentaries that emerged in the wake of the 2003 invasion of Iraq.[59] This sort of revisionism approach admits that there has long been an American empire. "Ever since the annexation of Texas and invasion of the Philippines," declares Niall Ferguson, "the United States has systematically pursued an imperial policy."[60] But it also insists that American empire has been special. Giving with one hand while taking from the other, it reinscribes exceptionalism by claiming that America's empire has been unique for its liberal and benign character. Whereas European empires were tyrannical and exploitative, American empire has been selfless, aiming to promote democracy and liberty around the world. "America's imperial goals and *modus operandi* are much more limited and benign than were those of age-old emperors."[61] Whereas European empires suppressed liberty, rights, and democracy, America's empire has been aimed at spreading them. "American imperialists usually moved much more quickly than their European counterparts to transfer power to democratically elected local rulers – as they are attempting to do in Iraq."[62] Traditional exceptionalism represses the word "empire," but this variant of revisionism just proclaims a distinctly American imperialism that ostensibly manifests America's special virtues.

The second variant of revisionism, which might be called "critical revisionism," comes initially from the founding historiography of William A. Williams and harkens back to leftist critiques of imperialism. This approach also insists that the United States has been an empire, but it does not see the American empire as uniquely benign. Rather than praising American empire for its liberal character, it portrays empire as a dangerous exploitative force. How, then, does this critical revisionism reinscribe exceptionalist thought?

[58] Bacevich (2002), p. 243.
[59] This includes the work of Niall Ferguson, Max Boot, and others who have been associated with American neoconservativism under George W. Bush's regime.
[60] Quoted in Dowd (2003), p. 27. See also Ferguson (2004) and Raustiala (2003).
[61] Ikenberry (2002), p. 59.
[62] Boot (2003), p. 363.

The reinscription involves two steps. The first is to pinpoint American empire's particularity by saying it has taken on a special form. American empire, in this view, has been indirect and less territorial than other empires. This constitutes a special "American way of empire" that is different from other ways of empire, a unique American brand of informal imperialism. The American empire has been distinct from European empires for its noncolonial character, employing nefarious economic or political means falling short of annexation to manipulate other societies. The second move is to then *explain* this difference (and a host of related ones) by reference to classic exceptionalist themes. If the U.S. empire has been informal rather than colonial, this is because of America's uniquely democratic traditions, beliefs, and values that militate against direct colonial rule and usurpations of sovereignty. Economic exploitation or resource extraction is acceptable, but colonialism is not. As one political scientist argues, the "political ethos and structure of the United States inherently militated against any doctrine other than that of national self-government for foreign peoples. . . . Among the Western democracies, the disinterest in foreign rule, and hence the prejudice in favor of the self-government of others, has been particularly pronounced in the United States."[63] The astute historian Anthony Pagden likewise asserts that colonialism "has never been an option for the United States." In order for the United States to be a colonial empire, "as even the British were at the end of the nineteenth century, the United States would have to change radically the nature of its political culture."[64] Others suggest that America has engaged in informal noncolonial imperialism because of its unique "social system," which has no natural "ruling class."[65] Tocqueville's reckonings here resound in revisionist reinscriptions of imperial exceptionalism.

So both neo-revisionism/liberal exceptionalism and critical revisionism would answer our comparative questions with neo-exceptionalist answers. Has the United States been an empire? Yes, but it has been a different empire than others. Why has the American empire been different? Because of America's special national character, institutions, or political culture.

But if revisionists already have an answer to our comparative questions, what is at stake in this book? Why bother with a comparative analysis? The problem is that the revisionist answers (and exceptionalist ones) remain hypotheses at best. To claim that anything is exceptional about the American empire depends on clarifying the "rule" against which the empire is measured; yet too often the rule is presumed rather than examined. Sustained comparative studies are few and far between. Hence, as long as our claims about what is distinct about the U.S. empire are not put into comparative relief, they remain tentative assertions subject to falsification through systematic comparison. We have already seen how a look at Britons' discourse of empire in the mid-nineteenth

[63] Schwabe (1986), p. 30.
[64] Pagden (2005), p. 54–5
[65] Porter (2006), pp. 91–2.

century reveals that the uniqueness of American empire cannot lie in the fact that Americans deny it. And if the specificity of the American empire does not lie in its self-denial, does it actually lie in its so-called reluctance or hesitance to colonize foreign land? Does it lie in the *way* it exerts power? Furthermore, if there are such differences, can they really be attributable to an exceptional or unique "national character" or special liberal-democratic "values"? Only a comparative investigation can properly answer these questions.

In short, exceptionalism and some brands of revisionism provide one perspective for specifying what is unique about the American empire and for explaining that uniqueness. But they do not validate their claims through comparison. Take an example. As noted, one revisionist argument is that the United States' empire has been distinct because, unlike Britain's empire, it has been informal and noncolonial. Presumably, this is due to America's egalitarian social structure and political culture. Because the United States lacks an aristocratic class predisposed to governing from afar, and because its democratically minded populace has supported the principle of self-determination around the world, the American state has been constrained to exert power over other societies in noncolonial, informal ways.[66] So what is wrong with such an argument? On its face, nothing. It *is* the case, for instance, that America has not had the same sort of aristocratic class as England. Yet merely pointing out this difference is not sufficient for validating the causal argument that the lack of an aristocratic class leads to a noncolonial strategy. We would have to trace the causal chain connecting the absence of the class to the absence of colonialism. Furthermore, one could think of various reasons for why a state adopts one imperial strategy rather than another. The presence or absence of an aristocratic governing class would constitute only one possible explanation among a range of alternative explanations. So we would need to consider alternative explanations too.

To be sure, alternative explanations can be formulated. For example, some studies of the British empire have shown that much of what the British empire did and the forms it took had to do with conditions in the *periphery* rather than in the metropole.[67] Similarly, some versions of international relations theory explain what states do by reference to the international system, not to the states' internal culture. Mandlebaum's classic study of states' security policy shows that variations between different states' security policies are "created by variations of the international system itself," such that "two states that are similarly situated in the system but have different domestic orders will tend to pursue similar security policies."[68] Both of these approaches offer

[66] Ibid., pp. 91–2; see also pp. 171–2; Schwabe (1986).

[67] This is the classic "peripheral" or "excentric" theory of imperial expansion first espoused in Robinson (1972).

[68] Mandelbaum (1988), p. 2. Within international relations theory, exceptionalist approaches to United States would be considered distinct from "realist" approaches. The latter approaches assume all states are similar (in that they all pursue similar interests), whereas the former assumes that the United States is a particular type of state because of its special values or

different takes on empire than exceptionalism or even revisionism. Rather than explaining what a state does or what type of empire it is by reference to characteristics intrinsic to the state itself, these approaches invite analysts to consider the characteristics of the periphery or the wider geopolitical field in which the state is embedded. Existing assertions of American exceptionalism do not consider these alternative possible explanations. Therefore, the argument that the American empire's distinctiveness is due to national traits or character remains open to justifiable questioning. Further investigation is necessary.

Comparing Empires

The comparative investigation in this book aims to overcome these explanatory limitations of existing scholarship. By adopting a comparative approach, it aims to pinpoint similarities and differences between the two empires. It then examines possible explanations for the variations and assesses them against the weight of evidence. But why use Britain as the key point of comparison? And exactly how should the comparison be conducted?

The British empire is particularly useful. First, popular discourse has often conjured the British empire as providing "lessons" for American empire. This is typical of the recent neoconservative discourse on American empire. "Afghanistan and other troubled lands today," wrote Max Boot in 2003, "cry out for the sort of enlightened foreign administration once provided by self-confident Englishmen in jodhpurs and pith helmets." But the comparisons in popular discourse reach further back. In 1965, an essay in the *New York Times* asked: "Is America an empire? It is a question which no American cares to ask himself and, if you ask it of him, he returns a hasty negative. 'Imperialism is not in our blood. You are still thinking in terms of the British Empire.'"[69] As popular discourse already thinks of Britain as the key reference point, a systematic comparison enables us to better assess these passing comparative claims.

The second reason for using Britain is that it provides a critical entry into the exceptionalism-revisionist debate and its various assertions. Britain is typically used in these debates as a comparative reference point (even if the comparison is usually made in passing reference). More specifically, the case of Britain is implicitly or explicitly invoked to validate cultural values or "national character" as the primary explanation. Britain's monarchical tradition and its aristocratic values are taken as a counterpoint to America's liberal-democratic and more egalitarian character. Comparison with Britain therefore shows America's exceptionalism. The logic is as follows: (1) Britain has different cultural values, political institutions, and traditions than the United States; (2) Britain (ostensibly) constructed an empire whereas the United States did not (or, in the

national character. For a good discussion of this in relation to the U.S. empire, see Ciutâ (2006).

[69] Fairlie (1965).

revisionist variant, the United States constructed a different type of empire); therefore (3) what makes the American empire (or lack thereof) different from Britain are America's exceptional cultural values, institutions, and traditions. These implicit comparisons warrant explicit consideration, which is why Britain is analytically useful here.[70]

The final reason for using Britain as a comparative case to the United States has to do with similarities between the two countries rather than differences. Although Britain and the United States have different cultural values and traditions, they share the fact that, of all states in the past centuries, only they have been *hegemonic*. As noted earlier, hegemony is an economic category to refer to a state's relative preponderance over the world economy. During the history of modern capitalism, only the United States and Britain undisputedly fit this category. Britain dominated the world economy in the mid-nineteenth century. It was the banker, baker, and workshop of the world, taking up the largest share of world GDP. The United States in the mid-twentieth century, after the Second World War, then occupied this niche. Of course, their two hegemonies are not exactly the same. There are differences in relative military capacity, economic policies, or the bases of their economic dominance. Yet none of this negates the fact that, when we use measures that scholars use to assess relative economic power in the world, only the United States and Britain have been hegemonic.[71] This similarity is important for adjudicating causal arguments. Working from such similarities, a controlled paired comparison is possible. As political scientist Sidney Tarrow explains, by beginning the comparison with "common foundations," we are less likely to overlook unseen variables that might better explain the outcome under consideration.[72]

To better understand this, consider if we compared the actions of one state with another state. Let's assume that the two states have different "national characters" or cultural values. Let's also say that we happen to find that the states carried out very different imperial strategies. With this sort of comparative method, we might conclude that the difference in imperial strategies can be explained by the different cultural traditions. But consider if the two states differed not just in their cultural values, but also in, say, their hegemonic status: State A dominated the world economy whereas State B did not. If this were the case, it might be that the difference in imperial strategy was not due to cultural difference, but rather to the difference in hegemonic status. Without holding hegemonic status constant – or "controlling" for it, to use social science parlance – it would be more difficult to assess which was the more important

[70] For recent calls to more systematically compare the U.S. empire with the British empire, among others, see Hopkins (2007). For a good overview comparison, see Howe (2003).

[71] For the most systematic assessments of economic dominance using statistical measures, see Maddison (2001) and Chase-Dunn, Jorgenson, Reifer, and Lio (2005). There have been debates about whether the United States or England have *really* been hegemonic (see, for example, Strange (1987), Martel (1991), and Schroeder (1994)). But these debates turn on a much broader definition of "hegemony" than the strict economic one used here.

[72] Tarrow (1999).

explanatory factor, culture or hegemonic status. We would not, in short, be able to validate or invalidate our claim that culture was the driving cause of imperialism.

This comparative fallacy underwrites many of the claims made in exceptionalist historiography and social science. For example, one of the ways in which claims about American exceptionalism have been sustained has been by comparing America's post–World War II foreign policy with Britain's imperialism of the late nineteenth century. By this comparison, we might find that the United States did not acquire colonies, whereas Britain in the late nineteenth century did, such as when it took part in the "scramble for Africa." This comparison could then be taken as evidence for an essential American anti-imperial character: The United States did not take new colonies because of its deeply democratic and liberal values. However, the problem here is with the time periods under comparison. Specifically, comparing America's lack of colonial annexations after World War II with Britain's colonial expansion in the late nineteenth century overlooks the very different situations of the two states. In the late nineteenth century, Britain was experiencing new economic competition after enjoying decades of dominance in the world economy. Economic competitors, such as Germany and the United States, were on the rise. This competition might have motivated Britain to seize new colonies. Acquiring new territory might have been an attempt to regain some economic power or, at the very least, prevent rivals from acquiring territory and thereby help thwart the rivals' competitiveness. The context for the United States after World War II, however, was very different. The United States dominated the world economy and faced very little if no economic competition whatsoever. It was in a hegemonic position. This position, not inherent national values or virtues, could plausibly help explain why the United States did not seize new colonies whereas Britain did. Unlike Britain, the United States dominated the world economy and did not face serious economic rivals. It had less of a *need* for overseas colonies.

This is not to say that the reason for the difference was in fact economic need. The point is that, by comparing Britain's and America's imperial activities at time periods when the two were differentially positioned in the world economy, we cannot rule out this alternative explanation. And without ruling out this alternative explanation, the exceptionalist explanation is open to serious question. It would be more persuasive to compare American and British actions in respectively similar historical phases so as to enable some rough controls over possibly confounding explanatory factors (like economic competition and/or hegemonic status).

Accordingly, the method in this book is not just to compare the British and American empires, but also to compare them across comparable historical phases. As both Britain and the United States have been hegemonic, they also experienced similar historical phases, and each of these phases has entailed other similarities. First, both Britain and the United States underwent a period of *hegemonic ascendancy* before they respectively reached hegemonic

TABLE I.1. *Phases in Hegemonic Careers: The United States and Britain*

Phase	Britain	US
Hegemonic Ascent*		
(a) long ascent	(a) 1688–1815	(a) 1776–1945
(b) short ascent	(b) 1763–1815	(b) 1873–1945
Hegemonic Maturity	1816–1872	1946–1973
Competition/Decline	1873–1939	1974-present

* The long ascent is the entire period before the state has reached hegemonic maturity; the short ascent refers to the period within the long ascent when the global system is "multipolar" (i.e., there is no clear hegemon and rivals are battling for hegemony); this period is the same as the "competition/decline" phase.

Sources: Boswell (2004); Chase-Dunn et al. (2005); Wallerstein (1984); Wallerstein (2002b); Wallerstein (1974).

maturity. Britain underwent this phase, roughly, from 1688 to 1815 (and more precisely from 1763 to 1815), and the United States did so from 1776 to 1945 (or from 1873 to 1945). This means that both, although at different times, were similarly positioned in the world system relative to other states. It also means that they shared other characteristics, such as the fact that they were both expanding their economies and internal state capacities. Second, both Britain and the United States then achieved *hegemonic maturity*: Britain from 1815 to 1873 and the United States from 1946 to 1973. In these periods, each state dominated the world's productive capacities (taking up the greatest shares of world GDP). Each also took up the greatest share of military capacities while enjoying relative economic prosperity at home. Finally, both states have experienced *hegemonic decline*: Britain from 1873 to 1939, and the United States from 1974 to the present. This means that both states experienced new economic competition from rivals that they had not experienced during their respective periods of hegemonic maturity. These were also periods, then, when the global system entered a new multipolar or competitive phase (see Table I.1).[73]

By comparing American and British imperial activities during these respective phases, our paired comparison is fulfilled at each step in the analysis. Because hegemony is not defined by imperialism but by relative economic position in the world, the analysis is not circular. Hegemony and empire are not

[73] The dividing line dates typically refer to either world wars, which can be seen as the apex of decline/ascent, or economic events that set off a new economic cycle. The periodization has been worked out by world-systems scholars. See Boswell (2004); Chase-Dunn, Jorgenson, Reifer, and Lio (2005); Wallerstein (1984), Wallerstein (2002b), Wallerstein (1974). The periodization is open to some dispute, but the world-systems literature convincingly demonstrates that if we follow our strict definition of hegemony as preponderance over the world economy, the periodization roughly holds. Other periodizations are available, but these are based on different definitions of hegemony. See, for example, Modelski (1978), Modelski and Thompson (1996).

the same thing; hence we can use the former to ground our comparisons of the latter. This, then, is not to presume that hegemonic phase actually determines imperial actions. It is merely to allow for a controlled comparison to better assess which possible factors might explain imperial actions. The point is to be more methodologically conscious about our comparisons and therefore maximize the validity of our claims.

There are obvious limitations to our method. The first is the "small-N" problem. This means that not all explanations can be properly tested. We would need additional cases beyond the United States and Britain in order to adjudicate more explanations. The second problem is that world developments might confound our attempt to control for variation. As we will see, for instance, the global context during America's period of hegemonic maturity (roughly 1946–1970s) was not exactly the same as the global context when Britain was hegemonic (in the mid-nineteenth century). The world system had itself changed, and this is a factor that must be considered when comparing the two states during those time periods. The final problem is that the comparison depends on analytically separating the two empires from each other when, in reality, they were not separated. When the United States was undergoing hegemonic ascent in the early twentieth century, Britain was undergoing hegemonic decline, and we cannot presume that the two processes were disconnected. In fact, as we will see, the U.S. empire made good use of Britain's existing empire to realize some of its ends. The two empires were often intertwined and entangled.

Despite these problems, this book stakes the claim that the comparative approach is still worthwhile. First, there is no doubt that the small-N problem is an endemic weakness of paired comparison. However, this weakness is exchanged for strength on other counts. Comparing many empires rather than just two may help overcome the small-N problem, but makes it more difficult to conduct a detailed concrete analysis. A very wide lens allows one to see more than a small lens, but not always as clearly. Therefore, although comparing Britain and the United States alone has its limitations, it also enables our study "to combine analytical leverage with in-depth knowledge."[74] Furthermore, even this small-N problem can be compensated for by examining not only the two empires at comparable historical phases, but also by bringing in their other historical phases as comparative reference points. For example, we can compare the United States and Britain during their respective periods of hegemonic maturity, and we can also bring into the comparison an analysis of the two states during their other historical periods, such as their respective periods of hegemonic ascent. This expands the comparative cases by comparing across empires *and* across time.

Second, whereas restricting our comparison to specific historical phases between the two states cannot control for world developments across the time periods, we can at least control for some possibly confounding factors where

[74] Tarrow (1999), p. 9. See also Steinmetz (2004).

we would otherwise not be able to. One is economic capacity. States undergoing the hegemonic maturity phase have more economic resources than when they are undergoing the ascendancy phase, which would in turn give the state more resources. This was indeed the case for both Britain and the United States, as we will see. Therefore, by comparing the two states during their respective stages of hegemonic ascendancy, we can control not just for relative position in the world economy, but also the factor of state capacity. In short, although no comparative method would be perfect, our approach offers one way – hitherto underutilized – to better explain whatever variations or similarities in imperial dynamics or forms that we might find.

There is a final value to tracking and comparing imperial activity by hegemonic phase: It offers a systematic way of considering a possible "natural history" of hegemonic empires. As hegemons rise, mature, and decline, what types of imperial activity do they engage in? Are there differences in their imperial practices or modalities depending on phase? And across the two hegemons analyzed here (Britain and the United States), are there common patterns of imperial activity in conjunction with hegemonic phase? Or are there fundamental differences in their imperial careers? Using hegemonic phases as a guide facilitates a properly *historical* analysis that considers sequence and process. This is a critical issue for analyzing empires in general. Any analysis of empires must take history seriously, in the sense that we must not presume a singular entity – for example, the British empire – that remains constant or unchanged over time.[75] Using hegemonic phases as an analytic guide focuses our attention on imperial formations in history – that is, multifaceted entities of power in the process of formation or reformation, disarticulation or dissolution, expansion, stability, or contraction. Whether or not such imperial processes correspond to hegemonic phases is one question we will want to consider.

What Lies Ahead

The book is organized in loose chronological and comparative fashion. Chapters proceed by comparing British and American imperial activities during their comparable phases of global power (ascent, maturity, decline) with some explanatory sections inserted within and between. Chapter 1, "Imperial Paths to Power," scrutinizes the two states' activities during their respective periods of hegemonic ascent: Britain from 1688 to 1815, and the United States from 1776 to 1945. Both states in these periods were economically ascendant. Both, too, developed their state capacities. The chapter shows that these similarities were also concomitant with certain similarities in imperialism that have been too often overlooked in existing scholarship. As both states developed their economies and capacities, both also embarked on territorial expansion. They also crafted similar forms of imperial rule and ideological self-conceptions. In

[75] Lieven (2005), p. 129.

fact, America's westward expansion entailed colonial rule over new territories that were not only similar to but also modeled on the colonial regimes Britain had previously constructed for the thirteen colonies. The idea of a special liberty-loving American empire was first forged amidst this process, but this had precedents in Britain's previous settler empire in the Americas. Finally, the United States constructed an overseas colonial empire around the turn of the twentieth century – encompassing such places as Puerto Rico, Hawaii, the Philippines, Guam, Samoa, and the Virgin Islands. This reveals that the United States has not shied away from formal administrative colonialism.

Some exceptionalist narratives might admit that America's expansion had imperialistic characteristics, but they would then insist that American imperialism was fundamentally different from other types of imperialism. Some exceptionalist commentaries, for instance, acknowledge that the United States took the Philippines as a colony, but they insist that the *way* in which the United States practiced colonialism was unique. Expressed as America's own exceptional political culture of democracy, U.S. colonialism in the Philippines was a benign form of rule, uniquely aimed at teaching Filipinos the ways of democracy. This renders America's empire a special empire, unmatched by others for its democratizing tendencies. Chapter 2, "Colonial Rules," tackles this assertion from the standpoint of comparative colonialisms. Looking at U.S. colonialism in the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Guam, and Samoa and comparing it with British colonialism in India and Fiji, the comparison unearths more similarities with British colonialism than has been disclosed in existing studies. It also shows that America's "national character" had little to do with the forms of rule the United States enacted in its colonies. America's colonial regimes – just like Britain's colonial regimes in Fiji and India – reflected local conditions rather than national values or metropolitan political institutions. This chapter thereby offers a theory of colonial forms, suggesting that colonial policies and institutions are determined not by the characteristics or character of the colonizer but by the complexities and contingencies of the colonial situation.

Chapter 3, "Hegemonies and Empires," compares the two imperial formations during their respective phases of hegemonic maturity: Britain from 1815 to 1873 and the United States from 1946 to 1973. The chapter shows that whereas the period of ascent was marked by relatively constant territorial expansion, the period of hegemonic maturity was marked by a relative contraction. After the United States seized the former Japanese-mandated territories in the aftermath of World War II, its territorial expansion halted. After the Napoleonic Wars, Britain's expansion similarly slowed. Direct control over territory became less prominent, and instead informal exercises of power took precedence. Both states preferred indirect nonterritorial rule over peripheral areas, creating empires of clients and subordinated allies. Attendant with both imperial formations, too, were a discourse and partial realization of open trading policies over and against the mercantilism of previous years. The enlargement of commercial space along with informal networks of imperial power thus trumped formal territorial domination. Sporadic military

interventions, the establishment of military outposts, and clientelistic relations with weaker states became the preferred tactics of imperial power.

Whereas previous chapters disclose fundamental similarities across the empires during their respective periods of hegemonic ascent and maturity, Chapter 4, "Imperial Forms, Global Fields," addresses one glaring difference between the U.S. and British empires. That is, whereas Britain mixed both formal and informal imperialism during its period of hegemonic maturity, the United States relied primarily on the informal mode of imperialism after taking the Japanese territories in the wake of World War II. During their respective periods of hegemony, both Britain and the United States *preferred* informal empire, but Britain nonetheless added some territorial holdings amidst its pursuit of informal empire whereas the American state did not. This remains a crucial difference that some existing commentaries have seized upon to show how the United States has been exceptional. The United States, it has been claimed, did not seize colonies after World War II because of its liberal democratic character. However, as we will see in this chapter, the reason why the United States did not in fact expand its territorial holdings had little to do with its exceptional political culture. Instead it had to do with the character of the global field after World War II that differed significantly from the field Britain engaged during its comparable period of hegemony. Whereas Britain faced an open field ripe for colonization, the United States faced a global field populated by allied empires and rising anticolonial nationalism. Only because of these features of the field, not because of America's national character, did the United States turn away from formal territorial rule.

Chapter 5, "Weary Titans: Declining Powers, New Imperialisms," brings us closer to the current era. It compares Britain's and America's imperial activities amidst their respective periods of hegemonic decline. These are periods when each state, although previously enjoying unqualified dominance over the world economy, faced unprecedented competitors (Britain circa 1873–1939; the United States circa 1973–present). The chapter shows that as both states experienced decline, so too did they intensify and/or extend their imperialistic activity compared with the previous period of hegemony. Both states, in short, embarked on new imperialisms, apparently replaying the imperial follies of their youth. For Britain, this was manifest primarily in its expansion of formal empire; for the United States, it was manifest in a range of new military interventions and temporary occupations (the assaults on Iraq in 1991 and 2003 were only tips of the iceberg: There were other deployments and occupations). Finally, this chapter reveals *why* both states embarked on new imperialisms during their respective periods of economic decline. The chapter will reveal that similarities between the states' imperialistic activities amidst decline are not coincidental but lie in deeper structural forces.

Chapter 6, "The Dynamics of Imperialism," takes a longer view of the two empires. Previous chapters examined specific phases in each imperial state's career, but this chapter puts them all together. It reveals that both empires followed similar historical dynamics over the long *durée*. Specifically, they each

followed a pattern of expansion, abatement, and reassertion constituting distinct waves of imperial aggression. The "new imperialism," in other words, was only one phase in a larger dynamic. The chapter then explains the pattern. It shows that the pattern is best understood by considering global competition. The overarching point is not different from the point of other chapters: In order to understand the two imperial formations, their practices and policies, and modalities and methods, we are better off eschewing exceptionalist explanations that focus on national character and instead consider wider fields of interaction and struggle.

Ultimately, this book compares the U.S. and British empires and interrogates the exceptionalist thesis, but it also carries larger lessons. In particular, it allows us to arrive at a larger theory of empires. The theory is simple enough, but it could be too easily ignored in both scholarship and popular discourse. And its implications are important. That is: Empires, rather than omnipotent powers that easily make and remake their subjects and spaces, and rather than entities shaped from within, must be understood as adaptive dynamic entities that are shaped and reshaped by foreign societies as much as they strive to control them. Empires are defined by power, but the modalities of power are crafted, limited, formed, and re-formed through the very relations power seeks to harness. This banality of imperial power, as we will see, is a far cry from exceptionalist portrayals of American empire.

5

Weary Titans

Declining Powers, New Imperialisms

> Rome . . . broke up, not from conquering too much, but from conquering too little.
>
> – Alexander Dirom, *Sketches of the State of the British Empire*, 1828 (p. 72)[1]

By 2009, at least sixty-two men and women who died in Iraq while serving in the U.S. armed forces did not come from within the United States. They came from the overseas territories of the United States: thirty-six from Puerto Rico; six from the Virgin Islands; seven from Guam; five from the Northern Marianas; and eight from American Samoa. An additional forty fatalities were American Indians or Native Alaskans, and forty-eight were Native Hawaiians or Pacific Islanders.[2] We should now know the significance of this. These numbers remind us of the tragedies of war, but they also evoke imperial continuities. They tell of connections between America's history of imperial intervention and its current imperial forays into the Middle East; of America's long-standing status as an imperial power; of resonances from the past to the present returns of empire. President George W. Bush alluded to similar continuities and imperial resonances when, in 2003, he gave a speech mentioning that "coalition forces, including Filipino peacekeepers and medical workers, are working for the rise of freedom and self-government in Iraq." He gave that speech in Manila, on the floor of the Philippine Congress that President William H. Taft had helped establish in 1907.

Referring to these imperial continuities, however, also raises questions about discontinuities. After all, when the United States seized the Philippine Islands and other overseas territories, it was only an ascending global power; merely a "New Empire," as Brooks Adams declared famously in 1903, positioning

[1] Dirom (1828), p. 72.

[2] From Fischer (2009), p. 3 and http://icasualties.org/Iraq/ByState.aspx (accessed May, 14, 2010). Sparrow (2006) notes the presence of colonial soldiers in Iraq.

itself to take over the world. The more recent imperial forays into Iraq have occurred in a very different climate, a very different geopolitical context. The United States has not been a hegemon ascending but a hegemon falling. Rather than a promising new player on the world scene whose imperial expansion once matched its youthful exuberance, the United States has been an aging empire watching dreadfully as rivals threaten to take their slice of the pie. In this very different context, what does imperial expansion mean?

One goal of this chapter is to address this question by casting a comparative eye on the British empire in the late nineteenth century. Britain too had faced economic decline. Beginning in the 1870s, rival powers like Germany, Russia, and the United States among others grasped increasing shares of world economic output. As a result, Britain's economic dominance was unsettled. Britain's economic decline thus prefigured America's decline in the late twentieth century. So what did this mean for their empires? As Britain and the United States began to face new competition from rivals, did their previous imperial modalities or intensities change too? Great powers can fall indeed; the purpose of this chapter to wonder whether such falls from economic dominance correspond with changes in imperial activity.

Features of Decline

Clarification is in order. We have said that Britain and the United States experienced decline, but the meaning of *decline* here should be foregrounded. Although there are a variety of ways to define the term, we refer to it in the narrow sense of *hegemonic decline*; that is, a fall in the hegemonic nations' relative economic standing in the world system. Decline does not mean a decrease in prestige or military power, although these things may accompany decline. It rather means a relative decrease in economic standing. What proportion of the world economy do the nations command? What is the nations' share of world GDP? This also means that decline is relative; relative to the nations' prior standing and to the economic standing of other nations in the system. Hegemonic nations enjoy a monopoly or preponderance over the world economy. When that share over world economic output decreases because rival powers are taking up more and more shares of their own, then the hegemon is in decline according to this definition.

Decline does not mean that the nation suddenly descends into the ranks of the world's poorest countries. In fact, during their periods of decline, both the United States and Britain remained among the world's most economically powerful countries. The point is that, relative to their previous economic monopoly of the world's productive powers and to the capacities of other nations, they descended. Furthermore, decline by this definition means that the global economic field as a whole is undergoing transformation. As the hegemon declines because rival nations take up a greater share of the world economy, the entire system passes from a condition of unipolarity – with one nation the economic

winner – to a multipolar economic condition. A near-monopoly structure in the global economic field passes into a more competitive structure.

Using this definition, many scholars have traced Britain's decline. Most agree it began in 1868 and was exacerbated with the 1873 crash on the Vienna money market. After 1873 came the "long depression" that lasted at least until 1896.[3] This depression was part of the decline. It was marked by a worldwide overproduction of agricultural and industrial goods, especially in iron and steel, and decreasing profits.[4] It was also accompanied by rising unemployment and slower economic growth. The depression came in fits and starts. There was a period during the 1870s, for example, when some in the British business sector and the policy elite were comparably optimistic about the economic situation. Yet the overarching trends throughout the period remained consistent. From 1820 to 1840, industrial production had grown at an annual rate of about 4 percent and, from 1840 to 1870, about 3 percent. But between 1875 and 1894 it grew only at 1.5 percent annually.[5] By 1879, British economists and policy makers were already worrying, culminating in the establishment of a Royal Commission to investigate the "Depression of Trade and Industry." The commission concluded that there was a "serious depression, affecting most trades and industries, characterized by surplus production, low prices, poor investment opportunities and unemployment."[6]

The depression was just one dimension of the larger issue; that is, competition from rising economic rivals, especially Germany and the United States. This means that even though the British economy was not disastrous in absolute terms, it was significantly challenged in relative terms. Although some British industries such as coal or textiles increased their output, for example, their relative share of world production diminished. In other industries like steel, chemicals, and electrical goods, Britain lost its earlier advantage.[7] British agriculture likewise faced competition, as grain imports from the United States and South America posed new trouble. And generally, imports in multiple sectors rose.[8] "We import half our food," complained Dilke in his 1890, *Problems of Greater Britain*; "we import the immense masses of raw material which are essential to our industry."[9]

Britain's declining competitiveness can be seen by comparing relative shares of world manufacturing output. During the height of British hegemony, Britain's manufacturing output constituted 19.9 percent of the world's total, creeping up to 22.9 percent in 1880. Its share only slightly declined to 18.5 percent in 1900, but it fell to 13.6 in 1913. Most important, the United States and Germany increasingly took greater shares. By 1900, the United States had

[3] Chamberlain (1984), p. 148.
[4] Ibid., p. 149.
[5] Kennedy (1987), p. 228.
[6] Chamberlain (1984), p. 149.
[7] Kennedy (1987), p. 228.
[8] Chamberlain (1984), p. 148.
[9] Dilke (1890), p. 4.

already surpassed Britain. By 1913, Germany had too. Relative decline is also evident in Thompson's index of "leading sector share," which affirms the figures on world manufacturing output. This includes not just manufacturing, but a range of sectors that show a continual decline in Britain's leading sector share: from .546 in 1850 to .430 in 1880 to .333 in 1890 and to .146 by 1910.[10] In this context, it is not surprising that writers and analysts continually spoke of doom. The "dream" of Britain as the workshop of the world, wrote one in 1870, had become "a dream of the past. . . . Other nations have entered the race, and although we are still the great traders of the world, the singularity of our position has gone."[11] Another writer warned, "there seems to be reasonable grounds for fearing that England's commercial supremacy may already be in danger."[12] These worries about rivals became all the more common as the years continued.

The United States experienced a similar decline, beginning in the 1970s in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis.[13] As with Britain's decline, there was an initial recession marked by decreasing profits and productivity. The average annual increase in labor productivity in the United States from 1948 to 1973 was 2.8 percent, but from 1981 to 1986 it was only 1.2 percent. The rate of profit in America's traditional sectors like manufacturing fell similarly.[14] There was a brief stint of optimism through the 1990s, reflected in scholarship and pundits who declared that America was not in fact declining, and that it was just taking the lead in other areas beyond its traditional manufacturing base: that is, in service or technology and finance.[15] This too was similar to Britain's decline: There had been in Britain a brief period of optimism after the initial recession. And as with the British case, the optimism about the United States proved far too hopeful. Britain had also gained ground during its decline in finance and service; some have claimed that the turn to such industries is not a transcendence of decline but its dominant sign.[16] In any case, the apparent boom of the 1990s was but a bubble that already began to burst before the end of the decade.[17]

These domestic economic issues aside, America's economic standing in relative terms fell from the mid-1970s while competitors rose and continued to rise. Initially, beginning in the late 1960s even, the key competition came from Japan and Germany. Beginning in the late 1980s came the European Union as a whole, the rise of Russia as a potential economic monster, and then China.

[10] Thompson (2001), p. 287.
[11] Grant (1870), p. 184.
[12] Bodelson (1968), p. 82.
[13] For a recent study showing an earlier starting point than 1973 but affirming decline, see Chase-Dunn, Giem, Jorgenson, Reifer, Rogers, and Lio (2002).
[14] Corden (1990).
[15] Strange (1987).
[16] Arrighi (1994). On finance and the service sector in the British case, see Cain and Hopkins (1993), Cain (1985).
[17] Brenner (2002).

Various measures show this. One useful measure has to do with the largest multinational corporations. In 1956, forty-two of the biggest fifty multinationals in the world were American. The rest of the world only had eight. By 1980, only twenty-three were American. The number of European firms was about equal. Throughout, the Japanese increased their number of firms in the top fifty.[18] Other data show a continuation of the trend through the 1990s and into the 2000s. Non-American firms constituted nine of the ten largest electronics and electrical equipment manufacturers in the world; eight of the ten largest auto makers and utility companies (gas and electric); seven of the ten largest petroleum refiners; and six of the ten largest telecommunication companies. Half of the ten largest pharmaceutical firms were non-American too. Of the top one hundred corporations in the world in 2000, as ranked by foreign-held assets, only twenty-three were American. "Together, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, with a combined gross domestic product (GDP) seven-tenths that of the US, had forty; Japan had sixteen. During the 1990s, the share of US multinationals in the foreign sales of the world's one hundred largest multinationals decreased from 30 to 25 percent; the share of EU-based companies increased from 41 to 46 percent."[19]

Measures regarding shares of the world economy are similarly informative. In 1950, the United States supplied half of the world's gross product; in 2002 it only supplied 21 percent. Sixty percent of manufacturing production in the world in 1950 came from the United States, but that fell to only 25 percent by 1999. Studies using somewhat different measures arrive at the same conclusion. In 1999, the United States contributed only 28 percent to world GDP, whereas the European Union had 30 percent of the total. Japan was only 12 percent and China's only 4 percent, but East Asia (excluding Japan) was the world's fastest-growing economy since the late 1990s.[20] In 2007, *The Economist* magazine scoffed "Come on number one, your time is up."[21] In 2004, the Institute for International Economics (which included on its board prominent economists and policy makers like Paul Volcker and Larry Summers) had determined that "the United States is no longer the world's dominant economic entity."[22]

Both the United States and Britain experienced decline, but was decline accompanied by a shift or change in imperialism too?

Britain's New Imperialism, 1870s–1914

It is by now well established that something about British imperialism changed in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The English economist J. A. Hobson in 1902 characterized it as a "new aggressive Imperialism" and an "expansion

[18] Bergesen and Sahoo (1985).
[19] Du Boff (2003).
[20] Boswell (2004).
[21] *The Economist*, April 14, 2007, p. 12.
[22] Bergsten and Institute for International Economics (2005), p. 20.

of British political despotism."[23] Countless other analysts since have spoken of Britain's "new imperialism." The idea was not questioned until Robinson and Gallagher's seminal article on the "imperialism of free trade." On the one hand, Robinson and Gallagher were suspicious of the notion that there was a new imperialism at the end of the nineteenth century. In their view, Britain had been continuously imperialistic throughout the century. On the other hand, Robinson and Gallagher's overarching point was not to deny that a change occurred at all. Their claim was that British imperialism was continuous at one level but discontinuous on another. Specifically, Britain was continuously imperialistic, but it changed the *mode* or *form* of imperialism. Britain in the mid-century preferred informal imperialism, but during the late nineteenth century – concomitant with its relative decline – the British state tended to replace informal with *formal* modes.[24]

Following from this characterization, we can indeed detect a new imperialism in the late nineteenth century coinciding with Britain's economic decline. It involved a shift from informal to formal modes of imperialism. To be sure, many of the areas that Britain had previously declined to colonize during its period of hegemony were put under direct British control in this decline period. Whereas the British state had rejected ideas of taking Fiji in the 1860s, it changed its mind in 1874 and seized it. Whereas Palmerston had long rejected the idea of taking Egypt as a colony, in 1882 British forces entered the territory, defeated Egyptian forces in the Battle of Tel-el-Kebir, and subsequently remained. Whereas the 1865 Parliamentary Select Committee had warned against extensions of British sovereignty over West African territories, in the 1880s Britain announced various protectorates along the Bights of Biafra and Benin, over Niger Delta states, and eventually over the entire coast of what the British called the Oil River States (later Nigeria). In East Africa, where clientelism had previously been the rule, the British declared protectorates over Somaliland (1887) and, with the help of Frederick Lugard's East Africa Company, over Buganda (1894). Britain also took greater responsibility over Sarawak, whereas it had denied it before (the Foreign Office in 1888 took charge of Sarawak's external affairs). The policy of hands-off became one of hands-on.

The British state also went further by intensifying or extending its control over other areas too. In South Africa, Britain took the Traansvaal as a colony in 1877 and in 1879 took Zululand. From 1877 through the early 1890s, it declared protectorates over Somaliland, Matabeleland (and the areas later forming Rhodesia), and Nyasaland. In what would become Malaysia in Southeast Asia, Britain established the Residency system (1874), slowly extended its influence through the region, and eventually constructed the Federated Malay States (1896). It further established a protectorate over Brunei (1888), seized

[23] Hobson (1965 [1902]), p. 131.

[24] For a good assessment of Robinson and Gallagher's thesis and some of the key debates around it, see Kennedy (1984) and Louis (1976).

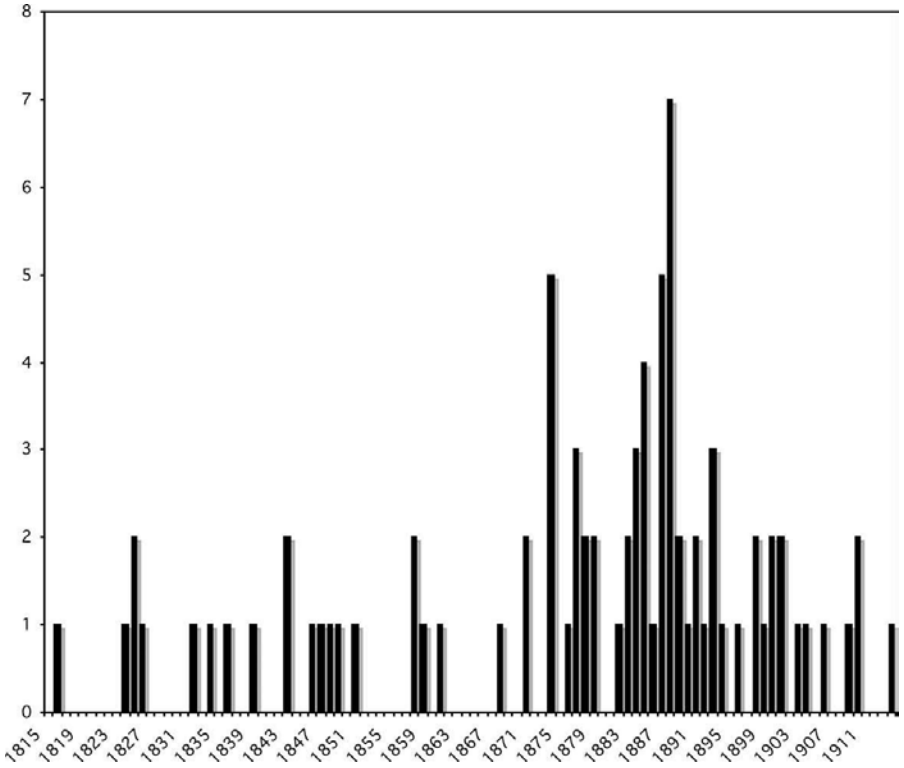

FIGURE 5.1. Number of British Colonial Annexations by Year, 1815–1914. *Source:* See Appendix: Notes on Data.

Burma as a colony in 1886, and sent British advisors to Thailand to help direct its financial and economic policies.[25] In the Pacific, besides seizing Fiji, Britain extended its rule over New Guinea (1884) and the Cook Islands (1881) while establishing the High Commission of the Western Pacific in 1877 to extend its control over the small islands of Gilbert, Ellice, the Soloman Islands, and the Pitcairn group; it further sent advisors to the monarchs of Tonga and Samoa. In short, there was both a shift away from informal strategies toward formal rule as well as an extension and intensification of political influence. The number of new colonies shows the trend. As Figure 5.1 reveals, the number of new territories directly annexed by Britain increased markedly in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

There is another sense in which Britain's imperialism shifted. Attendant with the extension or intensification of political control over peripheral areas was increased militaristic aggression. Of course, the British state had never been shy about using its military during its period of hegemony. However, the late century brought with it new military ventures. A look at the number of

[25] Brown (1978).

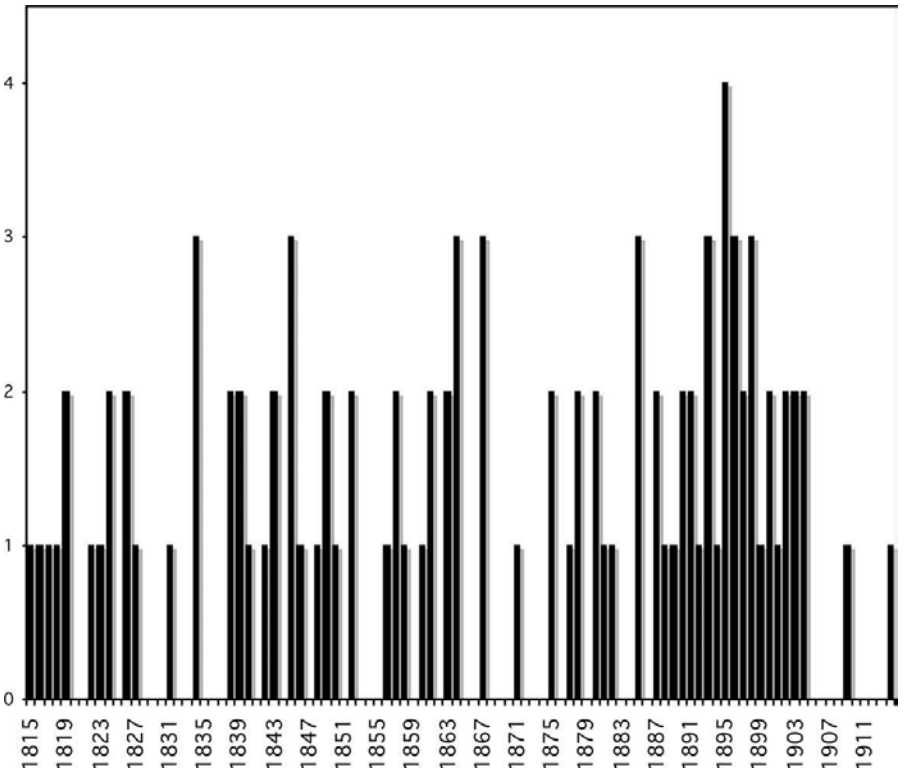

FIGURE 5.2. Number of British Military Interventions: Deployment of Troops or Ships outside Imperial Borders, 1815–1914. *Source:* See Appendix: Notes on Data.

military interventions initiated over the course of the century shows a higher amplitude and a greater frequency during Britain's period of decline compared with the previous period (see Figure 5.2). These included small wars with Arab slave traders in Nyasaland (1885–1889), attacks in West Africa on the Yonni (1887–1889), war with the Zulus (1887), the 1885 attack on Khartoum, the 1877–1878 Kaffir War, the 1878–1880 Anglo-Afghan war, and the Boer War, among others. In some cases, this use of force was related to the new territorial drive. Annexing Burma, for example, involved a war of conquest employing a military force 25,000 strong.

In short, Britain's new imperialism was not exactly a shift away from anti-imperialism. It was not about an absence of imperial power giving way to its presence. It was rather a change in the modalities and intensity of imperial power. It was a shift from indirect control to colonial rule as well as a new aggression – a greater willingness to blatantly use military power or otherwise establish formal political control. Rather than relying on clientelist networks, Britain became more and more determined to replace with them with colonial rule. And rather than sit idly by, the British state was more willing to use

military power over others. British imperialism became more *direct* – more bold and aggressive.

There is yet a final feature to Britain's new imperialism: a shift in discourse. We have seen already that mid-Victorian Britons did not utter "empire" consistently or frequently. When they did utter it, they did not typically associate it with a formal overseas empire consisting of foreign lands and peoples around the globe. This changed in the latter part of the century. It became more common to associate "empire" with all of Britain's overseas domains.[26] What was once a term exclusively for the United Kingdom became a term encompassing Britain's colonial spaces as well. When, for example, Councillor of Salford J. Snape gave a lecture on "The Trade of the British Empire" to the Conservative Club in 1882, he included under the rubric "empire" Britain's overseas possessions in the Americas and Asia.[27] An 1876 atlas on the "Geography of the British Empire" likewise defined the "British Empire" to include "the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, with the numerous foreign possessions, situated in nearly every part of the world, called Colonies and Dependencies."[28] A new coherence was thus given to Britain's overseas activity and modalities of colonial governance. Furthermore, there was a shift in emotional investment. During the middle part of the century, most of the English population was either ignorant of or ambivalent about the phrase British empire. However, as the historian Kitson Clark observes, beginning in the 1870s or so, "more and more people in Britain seem to have become aware of the Empire as an entity, possibly as a source of problems, possibly a source of pride." The term empire acquired a "deeper moral significance and a greater emotive force" than before.[29] Finally, there was a change in the *extent* of discourse about empire too. The number of articles using the phrase the "British Empire" in the London *Times* increased in the late nineteenth century, with only one comparable peak around 1855 (see Figure 3.1, previous chapter). This suggests that not only did the British empire become more militaristic and imperialistic in the territorial mode, it also became more vocal and self-conscious – a renewed cultural assertion to match its new global aggression.

American Aggression Resurgent

Has the United States undergone a similar shift in its imperial activities during its decline? If there was an American counterpart to Britain's new imperialism, we might expect to find the United States doing exactly what Britain did: that is, becoming more aggressive militarily and territorially. Just as Britain showed a tendency away from informal imperialism and toward formal imperialism,

[26] Koebner and Schmidt (1964), pp. 81–106.
[27] Snape (1882), p. 5.
[28] Johnson (1876), p. 7.
[29] Kitson Clark (1967), p. 65.

we would expect the United States to have done the same during its period of decline. Yet there is good reason to think that an American counterpart to Britain's new imperialism – if there was a counterpart at all – would not take the form of colonization. As seen in a previous chapter, the global context changed significantly in the twentieth century. Especially after the 1960s, it no longer became possible to annex new territories as formal colonies. Even if the American state did become more imperialistic during its period of decline, we would not expect it to come in colonial form.

What, then, would be a reasonable American counterpart to Britain's new imperialism, given the changed global context of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century? Rather than a shift from informal imperialism to formal imperialism, we might expect an expansion or intensification of informal imperialism marking a new boldness and aggression. That is, rather than covert operations or financial aid to realize its goals, we would expect the United States to show a greater willingness to use military force or deploy other direct mechanisms of power such as temporary military occupations. We would also expect the sheer frequency and amplitude of such exercises in imperial power to have heightened during the period of decline compared with America's period of hegemony. This would mark a new aggression, a new assertion of power, akin to Britain's in the late nineteenth century.

Some scholars have taken America's invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 as a sign of such a new imperialism. To be sure, it represented a relatively novel use of imperial power. The so-called Coalition Provisional Authority that ruled Iraq from 2003 to 2004 was a colonial government of sorts, reporting to the Department of Defense. This was not just a military invasion. The occupation of Afghanistan is similar: Unlike the military interventions that occurred after World War II through the 1970s, it involved not only a military campaign but also a period of military rule and political control. America's dealings with Iraq and Afghanistan therefore suggest that the United States had become more willing to act as an imperial power, with a new determination and verve to overtly manage the affairs of other countries.

If Iraq and Afghanistan are the only examples of a new imperialism, however, America's new imperialism pales in comparison with Britain's. With only two instances compared with Britain's more general and expanded imperialism, America's new imperialism would hardly seem to be indicative of anything at all. At most it simply would be attributable to a single event: September 11, 2001. Without the tragedy of September 11, there might not have been the invasion of either Iraq or Afghanistan. There would be no new imperialism over which to ponder. Even if they were not solely due to September 11, they could be readily dismissed as a blip; two exceptions reflecting the particular desires of Bush the Younger's administration. If that were the case, again there would be little similarity to Britain's new imperialism. Britain's new imperialism was extensive and consistent, and it occurred by the hand of different political parties in power.

Yet the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan can be seen as part of a bigger trend. Rather than only a response to September 11 or a reflection of Bush the Younger's administration alone, they are the culmination of a resurgent imperialism that had already begun to unfold years earlier. First, America's dealings with Iraq had occurred long before September 11. The first assault on Iraq was initiated by Bush the Elder in 1991. The Clinton administration extended the 1991 invasion with a barrage of air strikes through the rest of the decade. The war on Iraq did not begin in 2003. It began in 1991. It continued through Clinton's presidency and was merely picked up by the George W. Bush administration.

Second, and perhaps more important, the United States during its period of economic decline had been adopting a more aggressive and imperialistic approach to other areas in the world besides Iraq. The first instances of this new imperialism surfaced in the early 1980s, a time when America's economic decline in the previous decade had become painfully palpable.[30] In this period, in 1983, President Ronald Reagan authorized a force that ultimately totaled 7,000 troops to invade the island of Grenada. The force defeated the local People's Revolutionary Army and Militia and, within days, established control over Grenada's 100,000 inhabitants. Comparably speaking this was a "little war." But it is significant because it was the first use of American combat troops in the Caribbean in almost twenty years and the first major use of military force abroad since the Vietnam War.[31] The United States had gotten over its "Vietnam syndrome." To be sure, in 1988, President George H. Bush authorized yet another military invasion, this time of Panama, deploying some 24,000 U.S. troops. Grenada was the first major military deployment since Vietnam; the Panama invasion was the largest.[32]

Grenada and Panama were only small parts in a bigger play of renewed U.S. militarism in the Southern Hemisphere. In 1993, President Clinton ordered U.S. ships to embargo Haiti; in 1994 he decided to use 20,000 U.S. troops to occupy the country. The last U.S. troops did not leave Haiti for another six years. And later, in 2004, U.S. troops returned to Haiti for yet another occupation. There were also troop deployments to Colombia, Bolivia, and Peru as part of the war on drugs. Of course, covert tactics, typical of America's hegemonic period, persisted throughout. Reagan's support of the *contras* in Nicaragua is probably the only well-known example of them. However, the overt military deployments together suggest a greater willingness on the part of the American state to directly and openly intervene in the hemisphere than in previous decades. In fact, during the entire period from 1946 to 1982, there had been only *one* overt major U.S. operation in the Latin America, Central American, and Caribbean region. That was the deployment of troops to the Dominican Republic in 1965.

[30] Arrighi (2002), p. 21
[31] Nardin and Pritchard (1990), p. 1
[32] Haas (1999), p. 31.

These military operations occurred in Latin, Central, and South America: areas firmly within the United States' traditional sphere of influence. Other regions of the world, however, were also visited by the hand of American militarism. The 1980s saw interventions not only in Panama, Grenada, and Haiti, but also small troop deployments to Chad, Sinai, Egypt, Libya, the Persian Gulf, and Lebanon. The 1990s did not stop the trend. Besides the attack on Iraq in 1991 and continued strikes thereafter, the United States sent troops to Somalia, Kuwait, Zaire, Bosnia, Croatia, Haiti, Sudan, and Nigeria. The United States used military power twice in the Balkans and sent troops for an occupation mission, leading some scholars to call Clinton's presidency an "imperial presidency."[33] In light of this information, the claims of world-systems specialists like Giovanni Arrighi and Immanuel Wallerstein, who claim that the early 1980s mark a "drastic change in U.S. [foreign] policies," ring true.[34]

Some systematic data can help. The basic question is: Did the United States resort to military power to a greater extent during its period of decline than during its period of hegemony? One source for addressing this question is the 1999 report of the U.S. Commission on National Security, a blue-ribbon commission appointed by the U.S. government to consider America's national security policies. The report shows that during the decade of the 1990s alone, the United States had embarked on four times as many military operations as it had since the late 1940s.[35] This in itself is telling, but more in-depth data culled from other government documents and reports help round out the picture. If we count all of the overt military operations by the United States (including air raids and naval operations) from 1946 to 2004 (which was the first year after the invasion of Iraq), we see a trend. There is a higher frequency and amplitude in U.S. military interventions during the period attendant with America's economic decline (beginning in the 1980s) than during America's period of hegemonic maturity (1946 to the 1970s) (Figure 5.3). Military power was meted out in disproportion to America's relative economic power.

A few points demand elaboration here. First, the figures represent the number of interventions initiated. It does not refer to the duration of interventions. Still, duration might have more to do with other logics or factors besides historical phases. It might, for example, reflect the amount of domestic or local resistance to the intervention, the relative amount of military resources available, or various other events. What matters is the *decision* to employ force; the decision on the part of the government to reach and act beyond its borders – either by the deployment of troops, the use of air strikes, sending military support, or temporary military occupation. Second, the figures do not show the actual number of troops deployed. If the United States used less and less troops in the decline period, despite the raw number of actual discrete interventions,

[33] Banks and Straussman (1999).
[34] Arrighi (2002), p. 21; [Wallerstein, 2002 #1328], p. 64.
[35] United States Commission on National Security (1999), p. 127.

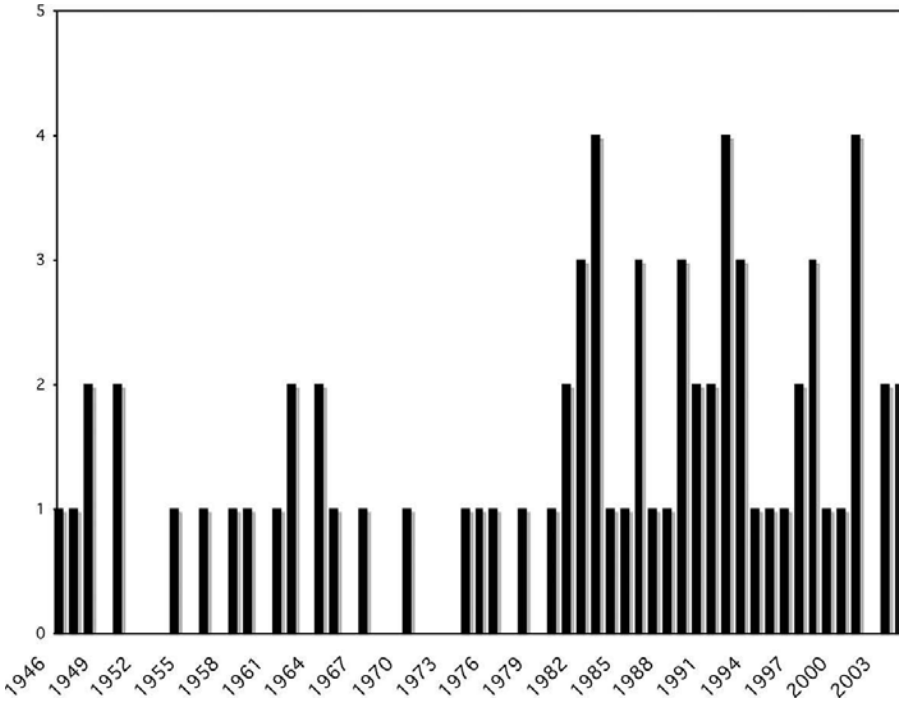

FIGURE 5.3. Number of Military Interventions by the United States, 1946–2004. *Source:* See Appendix: Notes on Data.

it might not represent a significant change or greater willingness to resort to military power. However, there are good reasons why troop numbers are not necessarily as informative as raw numbers of discrete interventions. One is that greater troop numbers might reflect the amount of local resistance to the intervention, the relative amount of military resources available, or various other events. If the U.S. military first intervenes and later escalates troops or resources, does this just reflect a contingent military strategy for winning the war or unexpected local resistance? Furthermore, comparing troop numbers over time would not necessarily be informative, due to the historical development of military technology. The use of one thousand ground troops in the 1953 might not be comparable to the use of one thousand troops in 1983, because the advances in military infrastructure mean that less troops might be necessary in the latter intervention, even if the troops were sent for the same kind of mission (and even if the proportion of troops to local population was the same). Yet even if we *do* count troops deployed, we still find that the United States employed greater military force during its decline period than during its period of hegemonic maturity. From 1946 to 1980, a span of thirty-four years, American troops used in military interventions totaled about 882,000. This includes Vietnam. Alternatively, during the smaller time span of twenty-five years, from 1981 to 2004, the total number of American troops deployed

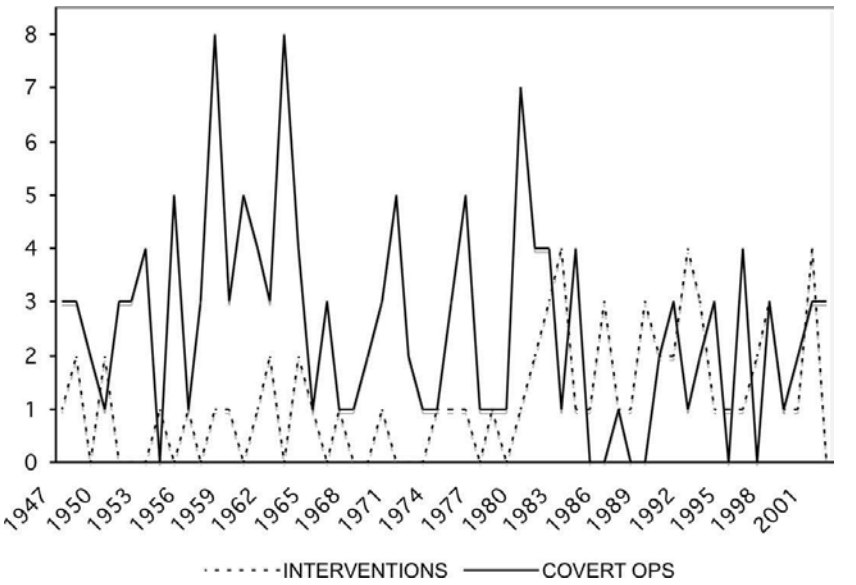

FIGURE 5.4. U.S. Military Deployments versus Covert Operations (Including Subverted Elections Aimed at Regime Change), 1947–2002. *Source:* See Appendix: Notes on Data.

in military interventions – by even the most conservative estimate – reached 1,425,809.

Further data helps affirm these findings and extend them. What if we compare covert operations to overt military activity? As discussed in a previous chapter, the United States during its period of hegemonic maturity constructed an informal empire partially based on a network of clients. This involved outflows of foreign aid to keep the clients in check. But it also, at times, involved electoral engineering and other types of covert activity to secure the victories of clients or keep them in power. Figure 5.4 suggests that, during America's period of hegemonic maturity, the American state preferred to use such tactics to direct military intervention. The data also show that those methods *decreased* as America's new imperialism was unleashed. Covert operations and electoral engineering were an alternative mechanism to direct military intervention. And during America's period of hegemonic decline, the American state preferred to use the latter than the former; marking a clear willingness to be overtly aggressive.

Just as Britain embarked on a new imperialism marked by increasing aggression during its period of decline, so too did the United States during its comparable phase of decline. Yet there is another similarity. Attendant with Britain's new imperialism, we have seen that there was a rise in *talk* about the British empire. American discourse of empire also appears to have proliferated during its period of decline (see Figure 5.5). The number of articles containing the phrase "American Empire" in the *New York Times* is small during America's

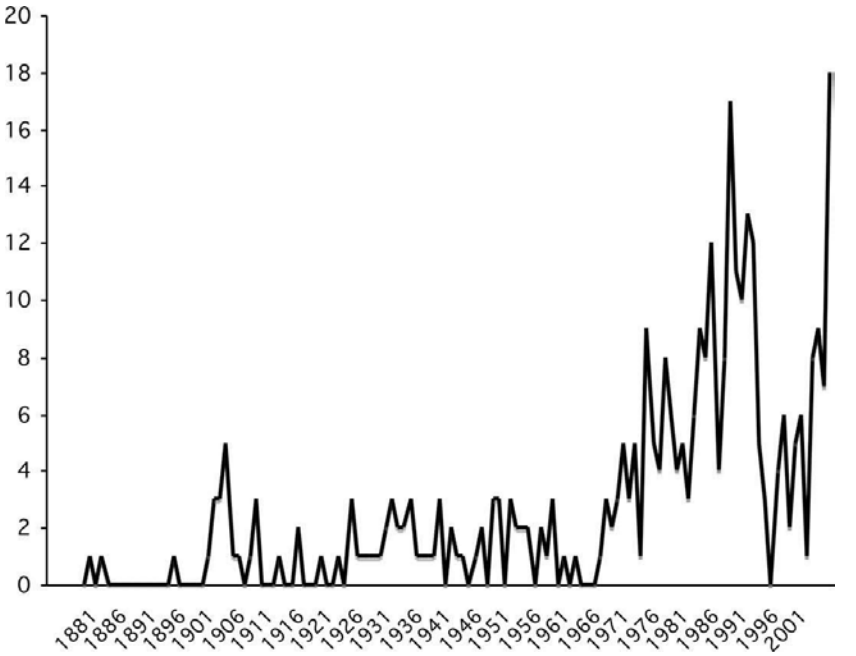

FIGURE 5.5. American "Empire" Discourse: Number of Times "American Empire" Appears in the *New York Times*, 1877–2003.* *Source:* Counted from the *New York Times*, Proquest Historical Newspapers. **Note:* References to "American Empire" that refer to a business or non-U.S. entity (e.g., South America) are not included.

period of hegemony, peaking at only three articles per year. However, a jump in the number of articles occurs in the late 1960s and carries through the 1980s. There was a slight dip in the early 1990s, but the number of articles picks up again in the mid-1990s and builds up to 2003. Clearly, talk of American empire proliferated after key events like Vietnam and September 11, 2001, and much can be attributed to those events alone. Yet the rise in discourse in the other years shows that the new imperial consciousness – just like the new militarism – was not restricted exclusively to those events. America's new imperialism has been more pervasive than a single event can disclose.

In short, both Britain and the United States embarked on new imperialisms during their respective periods of decline. The forms differed slightly. Britain's new imperialism was marked by a shift from informal modes of control to direct colonial annexation and increased militarism, whereas America's new imperialism primarily involved a shift from overt modalities of influence to more direct militaristic aggression and temporary military occupations. But both states intensified their direct imperialism while adopting more bold modalities of power. Both became more aggressive. And both did so during their respective periods of decline. This raises the question of whether decline was systematically associated with the new imperialisms and, if so, exactly how. We cannot

assume a direct connection. The coincidence between decline and the new imperialisms could very well be just that: a coincidence. A closer examination is warranted.

Explaining Britain's New Imperialism

Ever since the founding works of Herbert Spencer and J. A. Hobson, scholars have long examined and debated the forces or causes behind Britain's new imperialism.[36] Yet despite the vast literature, there has been little consensus on which factor best explains British imperialism. This is partially because historians adjudicating the different explanations have looked at particular instances of the new imperialism to find some but not all factors at work.[37] A different approach would be to first consider the wider historical context in which the new imperialism unfolded. Rather than look for a single causal force, this approach would have us locate a conjuncture of possible factors that created a wider climate and a set of enabling conditions for increased imperial aggression. By this approach, we will see three forces in particular: economic crisis, geopolitical threats, and peripheral instability. We will then examine some specific instances of the new imperialism – from the invasion of Abyssinia to the annexation of Fiji, among others – to see the forces at work in particular contexts.

The New Context

One important novel feature of the late nineteenth century had to do with the economy: As seen, after enjoying decades of dominance in the world economy, Britain faced increasing competition from rivals and began its decline. But it is important to specify how this broader economic process played out in particular sites. First, at home, economic decline meant bouts of economic depression marked by unemployment and falling rates of profit. This in turn led to sociopolitical unrest. Public demonstrations after the 1866 crash, for instance, raised fears among the upper classes and the political elite that the "flood-gates to anarchy" were being opened and that revolutionary mobs would take power (as had happened in Paris in 1848).[38] John Godfrey, president of the Patriotic Association of Marylebone, worried in 1882 that "our power, our greatness, our character abroad, are being ruined; our trade destroyed; and at home, our country disgraced by a state of lawlessness, anarchy, assassination, and crime, causing in the wide civilized world an expression of contempt and loud

[36] Spencer (1902). Spencer's themes were picked up in Schumpeter's *Imperialism and Social Classes*. Hobson's theory set the conditions for Lenin's explanation of imperialism as the "highest stage of capitalism" and a variety of subsequent Marxist and neo-Marxist theories. See for overviews Brewer (1990), Etherington (1982), and Mommsen (1982) among others. Robinson and Gallagher's "excentric" theory later emerged, as have more recent variations on the economic theme by Cain and Hopkins. See Robinson (1972) and Cain and Hopkins (1993).

[37] Eldridge (1978), p. 133. For reviews of some of the vast literature, see Sturgis (1984).

[38] Harcourt (1980), p. 91.

reproach for the loss of that energy, power, and practical action of the old English character."[39]

Economic decline, secondly, meant that economic interests abroad were put at new risk. Part of the reason why Britain faced domestic economic troubles in the first place was that Germany and the United States, and even France and Russia to some extent, were increasing their market shares and productive capacities; and this competition added another layer of threat to the economic and political elite. Investigations by the Royal Commission on Trade and Industry in the mid-1880s concluded that surplus production, low prices, and weak investment opportunities were the culprits for Britain's new economic woes. Most representatives from industry blamed foreign competition rather than rising workers' wages. The view was that rival countries' agricultural and rising manufacturing production was keeping prices and profits low. Other observers repeatedly worried that those countries' growth in production, coupled with Britain's free trade orientation, had made Britain increasingly dependent on imports. Ostensibly, this economic competition was worsened by rivals' protectionist tariffs.[40] The United States had been maintaining high tariffs since the Civil War. There were substantial tariff hikes across Europe, with increases occurring in Russia, Spain, Italy, Germany, and France between 1877 and 1882 and continuing through the 1890s.[41] In this context, it is not surprising that British capitalists and merchants became increasingly fearful. As one historian notes, at the end of the 1870s, the commercial confidence of previous decades "were replaced by feelings of uncertainty, even of insecurity, and many merchants began to fear that Britain's commercial supremacy was no longer something they could take for granted."[42]

Another important factor to the new context was geopolitical. The rise of rival economic powers came not only with economic threats, but also new political and security threats.[43] One such threat had to do with the European Continent. During the mid-nineteenth century, Britain had been able to avoid massive military commitments on the Continent by building a balance of military and political power between the European states. However, with the Franco-Prussian War and the subsequent unification of Prussia and Italy, this balance of power was unsettled. Disraeli, in his 1871 response to the Franco-Prussian War, feared that the balance of power was "entirely destroyed." Britain faced "a new world, new influences at work, new and unknown objects and dangers."[44] The European threat coincided with other dangers too. America's economic ascendance in the wake of the Civil War and the unification of Prussia and Italy portended a world in which size was increasingly important

[39] Godfrey (1882), p. 4.
[40] Chamberlain (1984), p. 149.
[41] O'Brien and Pigman (1992), p. 104.
[42] Hynes (1976), p. 972.
[43] Kennedy (1981), p. 29.
[44] Quoted in Buckle (1920), pp. 1–134.

for power. An "era of big states" loomed on the horizon and many worried if "little England" would survive the new landscape. Might Britain, one writer worried, "sink as Holland had sunk into a community of harmless traders?"[45] Furthermore, rival states were not only unifying but also expanding overseas. France was taking on increasing involvement in Tahiti (1880), Tunis (1881), Tonkin (1882), and Madagascar (1884), among others; Germany was capturing its own colonies just as it was expanding its overseas commercial activity; the United States in the wake of the Civil War was making its presence felt more and more in the Caribbean and Latin America; Russia was advancing toward Afghanistan and building railways in Central Asia; and Japan was casting its eye ever more outward.[46] The growing military power of these rivals made matters worse still. Although Britain maintained its naval dominance in these years, other states were slowly building up their naval capacities.[47] "Great Britain," Francis and Tebbitt warned in 1880, "must be prepared for hostile combinations in the future, far exceeding in potency those whose fate our history recounts."[48] Meanwhile, General Charles George Gordon's humiliating defeat at Khartoum in 1885 put into question the capacity of the British army.[49]

The final relevant development in the late nineteenth century had to do with the periphery of Britain's imperial system. As noted in a previous chapter, British imperialism in the mid-Victorian period partly involved the creation of client states and collaborative regimes abroad that helped Britain extend trade and maintain a network of security for it. This was informal empire layered on top of Britain's formal empire. But informal empire itself created the possibility for new troubles and tensions. As it brought British consuls, merchants, missionaries, and explorers to new lands, and as it brought foreign aid, capital, and commodities, so too did it increase the possibility of conflict. The political logic of informal rule itself carried the possibility for such conflict. British proconsuls, advisors, or enterprises established collaborative relations with local rulers, but local rulers or chiefs could become recalcitrant to British aims over time. "The danger of new friendly overtures with Natives," recognized the parliamentary undersecretary in 1868, when confronted with suggestions to extend British informal influence over the Malaya states, "is that they always take them to mean more than they do."[50] Additionally, collaborative relations with one ruler or another could provoke resentment or aggression from neighboring rivals with their own agendas. In the Gold Coast, British settlements, Beecroft's attempts to curb the slave trading, and commercial trade with the Fanti all invoked the ire of the Fanti's enemies (the Ashanti Confederation), which in turn precipitated clashes with British forces.

45 Quoted in Tyler (1938), p. 14.
46 Kennedy (1975), p. 144; Beeler (1997), pp. 16–17; Kennedy (1981), p. 29.
47 Lambert (1995), pp. 73–5.
48 Lloyd and Tebbitt (1880), p. 58.
49 Beeler (1997), pp. 16–17.
50 Quoted in McIntyre (1967), p. 161.

Informal empire also entailed the influx of financial aid or capital investment to new areas, which could disrupt local economies and foment social unrest or political disorder. Resentment from below could be unleashed, local rulers or princes might find themselves financially indebted, and the local rulers' capacities to maintain legitimate power (and therefore serve as effective clients to British overlords) could be undermined. In Burma, Britain's trade treaties in 1862 and 1867 with Prince Mindon compelled Mindon to impose "politically troublesome levels of direct taxation on his subjects," which, among other events, put the country into socioeconomic crisis by 1878.[51] Similarly, in Egypt, the establishment of free trade in 1841, financial aid and lending, and the overthrow by Britain and France of the Khedivate led to economic crises as well as indignation among local landlords, the military, and Muslim religious leaders, leading to a wave of antiforeign sentiment and protonationalist revolt.[52] The potential for these scenarios around other parts of the world probably increased in the late nineteenth century not only because of Britain's informal political influence, but also because of the increased export of British capital to peripheral regions. British capital exports rose significantly during the 1850s to the 1870s and dramatically increased after the 1870s in response to the perceived lack of investment opportunities at home.[53]

In short, three new forces marked Britain's period of economic decline: economic crisis, geopolitical threats, and peripheral instability. Admittedly, not all of these forces were new. Britain had faced the threat of military rivals before. It had always been concerned about maintaining security while simultaneously striving to maintain and expand its trade. It had also faced the potential for disorder in its informal (and colonial) empire. However, as Paul Kennedy points out: "What was different now was that the relative power of the various challenger states was much greater, while the threats seemed to be developing almost simultaneously."[54] In this sense, the world faced by Britain in the late nineteenth century was indeed different from that of the mid-century, not least because of hegemonic decline. This was the structure of the conjuncture that propelled the new imperialism.

Context to Causation

To see the forces at work, consider some notable cases of Britain's new imperialism. The invasion of Abyssinia in 1867 is one such notable case, not least because it has been taken by some scholars as a critical turning point. On the one hand, the invasion was not exactly indicative of the new imperialism. British forces did not remain there and instead left behind an officially independent client rather than a colony. On the other hand, it was indeed a turning point. Previously, Britain had maintained a relatively cautious approach

[51] Webster (2000), p. 1006.
[52] Robinson and Gallagher (1961), ch. 4. See also Owen (1972).
[53] Davis and Huttenback (1988), p. 43; Edelstein (1982).
[54] Kennedy (1987), p. 227.

to Africa, preferring informal rule to colonization. However, the invasion of Abyssinia reversed this previous hesitation to intervene. It was followed by various other new interventions into the region. In these ways, the Abyssinian invasion marked a radical turn, a "decisive break with the past."[55]

So what induced this break with the past? Part of the answer lies in peripheral instability brought on by informal empire. The pretext for the invasion was King Theodore's seizure of Europeans, including some diplomats and missionaries. The British consul to the area, Walter Plowden, who had been attempting to expand trade, was killed in 1860 amidst disorder and unrest that had been sporadically erupting in the region. This was not the only factor, however. In fact, British interests in the region were comparably minor, which is why the British state had been relatively indifferent to Plowden and his post. The Foreign Office had even felt that the British presence in the region should just be withdrawn entirely, for a continued presence might "involve us in complications . . . most desirable for the future to avoid."[56] In other words, there was peripheral instability, but the British state did not have to intervene: It could have just let things go. Hence, what tipped the balance toward intervention was the fact of British economic decline. In May 1866, a wave of bankruptcies swept financial circles, and the repercussions of "Black Friday" were felt all over the nation. The sudden decline of profits put the middle classes into an unforeseen precarious position; food prices rose; the London shipbuilding industry fell apart; and unemployment and poverty proliferated. The depression was seen as "one of the most painful and severe of the century." It was accompanied by public protests against the administration of Lord Derby.[57]

This situation contributed to the invasion of Abyssinia. According to historian Freda Harcourt, the Disraeli government resorted to imperialism as a way to manage the economic crisis. Disraeli decided to invade Abyssinia as a unifying tactic to restore the government's popularity. Diverse social classes could rally around the flag. The invasion would demonstrate to the populace that Britain still had muscle despite the economic crisis and despite rivals' economic advances. It would confirm "Britain's position as a great power in a rapidly changing world . . . serve as a focus for the energies of the whole nation and provide a foundation for national unity."[58] Fittingly, after the battle, Northcote told Napier, "Where we were considered the weakest of military nations we have shown ourselves the strongest. . . . This expedition . . . will have effected as great an alteration in our position in the eyes of Europe as the battle of Sadowa effected in the position of Prussia."[59] The popular press likewise basked in the glory of victory, constructing it as Britain's "rehabilitation in the esteem

[55] Harcourt (1980), pp. 88–9.
[56] Marry's memo, on his interview with Napier, Aug. 4, 1868, FO 1/26.
[57] Harcourt (1980), pp. 89–90; quote on p. 89.
[58] Ibid., p. 89.
[59] Northcore to Napier, quoted in ibid., p. 103.

of the world" and as a restoration of "our old reputation."[60] In short, what determined the new imperialism in the case of Abyssinia was the convergence of peripheral crisis and the changed socioeconomic situation. The socioeconomic situation made jingoism and imperialism more attractive; political elites could gain electoral advantage by playing "the empire card."[61]

This was the process propelling many of Britain's other militaristic ventures too. Various military campaigns after the Abyssinian invasion carried with them bouts of popular enthusiasm and jingoism (e.g., the Ashanti campaign of 1874 and the Boer War in 1899).[62] In some cases, political elites made straightforward calculations about how interventions abroad might serve as an electoral tactic. In 1885, for example, the new secretary of state for India, Lord Randolph Churchill, suggested that a strong response to French advances in Burma might prove popular with the electorate and thus help Salisbury's minority Conservative administration.[63] The new discourse of empire that proliferated at this time therefore makes sense. The "British Empire" and "Our Empire" became signs under which various social classes (hence voters) could proudly gather.[64] A pamphlet published in 1886, "The Strength and Weakness of the British Empire: Dedicated to the Working Men of England," tells something of this. Written by an anonymous "Working Man," it beseeched the working class to become more familiar with and support the empire. It also urged them to disavow social protest:

> Working men of England. In the future you must be your own protectors; that is, you must protect yourselves from falling into disgrace by the action of the mob at any time. The recent riot at the west-end of London, February 8, 1886, gave you a slight proof of what has already been told you; behind the mob comes ruin and desolation. Genuine English working men would never behave in that manner. . . . Do your duty; work quietly and effectively for a united Empire and a united people; and those that come after you will bless and esteem your memory.[65]

This suggests that domestic socioeconomic crises, along with the cynical manipulations of opinion inspired by the socioeconomic context, help account for the militaristic aspects of Britain's new imperialism. Yet the domestic economic situation can hardly account for all of Britain's new imperialism. There were other annexations that were not popularized. In these cases other factors were at work.

[60] *Lloyd's*, May 31, 1868, p. 6 quoted in ibid., p. 104.

[61] Chamberlain (1988), p. 132. For similar arguments on social imperialism and jingoism, see Cunningham (1971).

[62] See MacKenzie (1986), pp. 2–3; Cunningham (1971); Cunningham (1981). This is not distinct from the trend noted by Spencer. For Spencer, Britain's new imperialism marked a "rebarbarisation" whereby Britain's ruling classes, enamored with the ancient militarism of Rome, directed the press and Parliament toward a new jingoism celebrating aggression. Spencer (1902).

[63] Webster (2000), p. 1019.

[64] See also Kennedy (1984), p. 29.

[65] Anonymous (1886), pp. 152–4.

The invasion of Egypt in 1882 is telling. As with the case of Abyssinia, Egypt has been seen by historians as a critical turning point toward Britain's new imperialism and likewise as a sort of "test case" for assessing different theories of imperialism.[66] The subsequent literature on the occupation by historians reveals multiple factors at work. One was financial. British capital had been injected into Egypt during previous years. Prime Minister Gladstone himself had some financial stakes. Another was peripheral crisis. Although financial interests were at stake, what made intervention even more likely than before was the crisis brought on by social and political upheaval in the wake of stringent financial controls on the Khedive.[67] The final factor had to do with geopolitical threats that in turn posed economic threats. To the British state, Egypt's Suez Canal was vital: In the hands of a rival, it could undercut British power in the region and even cut off links to Britain's trade with India. "For India," noted Gladstone, "the Suez Canal is the connecting link between herself and the centre of power – the centre of the moral, social and political power of the world."[68] Gladstone and other Whitehall officials were especially worried about French control. The French had long had eyes on Egypt and had financial investments there too.[69] They also worried about Russia and its slow advance into the region. As Porter explains, "with Britain in Egypt not only would British gain advantage over France and greater security for the Suez Canal route to India but above all an important lever in negotiation with the Ottoman government to contain Russian expansion into Turkey and the eastern Mediterranean."[70]

Unlike the invasion of Abyssinia, the invasion of Egypt was a matter of global and not just domestic concern. Like Abyssinia, however, it was driven by the new climate of economic threat. The same could be said of other instances of the new imperialism. In West Africa, for example, British expansion was partly driven by geopolitical concerns, but economic competition also played a part. The need for new markets in West Africa had been a common call among merchants and manufacturers during the depression. These groups put continued pressure on the British government to take action in Africa. They were quick to argue that the need for new markets was especially important given the threat of rival economic blocs forged by new tariffs. The Council of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce informed the Foreign Office, upon experiencing the effects of the McKinley tariff on their exports to the United States: "[I]n view of the successive limitation of our export trade, caused by hostile foreign tariffs and the need for developing fresh markets, Her Majesty's Government [is] urged to maintain the sphere of British influence in Africa."[71] These fears were

[66] Hyam (1999), p. 39.
[67] Cain and Hopkins (1993), p. 369.
[68] Gladstone quoted in Hyam (1999), p. 40.
[69] Dilke quoted in Galbraith and al-Sayyid-Marsot (1978), p. 484.
[70] Porter (1999), p. 12.
[71] Quoted in Hynes (1976), p. 977; for more on this, see ibid., pp. 973–7 and Hopkins (1968).

not unfounded. At the Berlin West Africa Conference of 1884–1885, countries like France and Portugal attacked the idea of keeping African holdings open to free trade. There had been mutual tariff discrimination between the British Royal Niger Company and French and German possessions.[72] The Liverpool Chamber of Commerce concluded:

> In West Africa the British governments of the last decade have been outstripped by Germany and France; the Gambia has dwindled; the Cameroons has been lost; two foreign powers have intervened between Lagos and Gold Coast Colonies . . . the French have spread themselves over Senegambia and the British governments have yielded the districts of the Northern Rivers of Sierra Leone . . . the Chamber is of the opinion that wherever in the unappropriated territories of Africa preponderance of British trade existed, there British interests should have been secured, by proclaiming such territories spheres of British influence.[73]

These concerns led the British state to act decisively. Whereas it had been previously content with informal control, direct British rule was now the only alternative. "What moved a reluctant British government to act," notes the historian Muriel Chamberlain, "was the recognition that British trade was in danger and that, in the last resort, the government had a duty to protect that trade."[74]

What about Britain's imperialism elsewhere in the world, such as Southeast Asia or the Pacific? One factor driving British annexation of Burma in 1886 was, as in Egypt, peripheral instability brought on by informal imperialism. Trade treaties with Prince Mindon in 1862 and 1867 opened up Burma to British commerce and put Mindon on a path toward modernizing his country, but it also created a myriad of local troubles. Mindon was compelled to set high taxes on his subjects to pay for his reforms, and this coupled with other economic contingencies left Burma in crisis in 1878. When Prince Thibaw took power that year, after Mindon's death, he began a campaign of anti-British sentiment and refused to comply with prior trade treaties. He also tried to impose state monopolies over the trade in key articles like cotton; and he sent a delegation to France looking to obtain a new commercial treaty and replace British influence with French influence. Britain faced a recalcitrant client.

An additional factor in Burma was economic interest. Thibaw's attempts to meddle in the cotton industry threatened the interests of the British firm, the Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation (BBTC). In 1885, Thibaw accused the BBTC of underpaying royalties and wages to local workers and demanded repayment along with a fine in excess of 100,000 pounds. As this news and the news of Thibaw's deal with the French hit home, domestic opinion rallied. British chambers of commerce sent petitions to the India Office demanding British annexation. After Thibaw continued to refuse to resolve the BBTC

[72] Hynes (1976), p. 976.
[73] Robinson and Gallagher (1961), p. 382.
[74] Chamberlain (1999), p. 55.

dispute, the British launched an invasion. At work, then, was not only a recalcitrant Thibaw, but the economic and geopolitical effects of his resistance. Pressure on the British government from financial interests was critical, as was the thought of losing privileged access to cotton.[75] The fear of French control was also important. Not only would French control threaten to close off Britain's economic access, it would also threaten British India, whose economic importance for the British economy at the time could not be ignored.[76]

Finally we can turn to Fiji. The establishment of colonialism in Fiji is especially informative because, as seen, the British state had previously been reluctant to add it to its empire. So what had changed? First, the cotton trade with Fiji had become especially important after the American Civil War. The value of the cotton trade had increased from 6,000 pounds in 1865 to 92,700 pounds by 1870.[77] Second, the trade had brought numerous white settlers, missionaries, and foreign planters. The presence of these groups created tensions with local Fijian chiefs and the local populace. Soon enough, settlers and planters pleaded for help from the British state. When a British bishop was murdered, settlers and planters became more insistent on British control. In 1872, after the murder, the interest of the colonial secretary, Lord Kimberley, was finally peaked.[78] These two factors, though, needed a third. In fact, when Lord Kimberley corresponded with Gladstone about possible Fijian annexation, Gladstone was initially cautious.[79] It was not until fears about America's activities surfaced that the home government turned around. In 1872, news of America's treaty for Pago Pago harbor in Samoa reached London, and this caused alarm. One of Britain's main economic rivals was reaching into the Pacific, dangerously close to Britain's Australasian holdings. The fear was heightened when rumors of a U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor circulated. And, in 1874, the American chargé d'affaires in London, Benjamin Moran, inquired at the Foreign Office about Britain's intentions toward Fiji, signaling that the United States might very well have its eyes on the islands. These concerns made the issue of peripheral instability all the more unbearable, and ultimately Britain decided to shift from informal imperialism in Fiji to direct control.[80]

In sum, although the cases discussed previously do not exhaust all of Britain's new imperialism, they show how the timing of Britain's new imperialism was not mere accident. The new imperialism occurred during Britain's period of

[75] See Webster (2000) for this story.

[76] In 1906, Winston Churchill, whose father had been Secretary for India and supported the seizure of upper Burma, wrote that fear of French control was a key motivation. The connections between Thibaw and the French "left no room to doubt the imminence of a dominant foreign influence . . . involving the most serious and far-reaching consequences to the Indian Empire" (Churchill 1906, I, p. 521).

[77] McIntyre (1960), p. 366.

[78] Routledge (1974), p. 279.

[79] McIntyre (1962), p. 271.

[80] McIntyre (1960), pp. 360–1.

decline, because decline (and hence, by definition, enhanced economic competition abroad) created the conditions for it in the first place. It is true that some of the forces driving new militaristic ventures or annexations were not directly connected to decline. Political crises at home, disorder in the periphery, and geopolitical threats – these were not the direct result of Britain's decreasing economic standing. But decline mattered critically in at least two respects. First, decline was part of the cause of these other factors. As seen, political crises were also economic crises: When the Disraeli government used the invasion of Abyssinia as a performance of British power, the government was responding to a broader climate of economic depression and political malaise brought on by enhanced competition abroad. If the Disraeli government used jingoistic imperialism to enhance British prestige, such a tactic was only necessary given the threats to British prestige brought on by decline. Second, decline mattered by making otherwise benign forces into serious threats. Surely it made peripheral instability especially dangerous. Unless managed, peripheral disorder would invite annexation by foreign powers. Given Britain's already ailing economic situation, this was unacceptable. Rival powers' enhanced military capabilities and/or new territorial annexations threatened not just British security but also future economic opportunities – opportunities that Britain could not afford to miss given its economic dilemmas. In other words, hegemonic decline cultivated a wider sense of fear and threat that was different from the relative complacency of Britain's economic heyday. Increased aggressive imperialism was the British state's way of trying to manage this context – a way of trying to deal with the proliferating threats brought on by decline and competition. The new imperialism marked a new aggression, but the new aggression was a sign of weakness rather than of strength, a desperate act of defense against a new climate of competition and pending doom. Was America's new imperialism the same?

Understanding America's Turn

We should not jump to the conclusion that decline sparked America's new militarism abroad. The new threat of terrorism was surely behind some of America's new militarism. It was the pretext for the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and various missile strikes and air bombardments in North Africa (e.g., Libya, the Sudan). And terrorist acts against the United States do not seem directly connected to American decline. Still, there are good reasons to think that more was going on. First, the various acts of terror that invited militaristic responses were not entirely contingent. The multiple terrorist incidents since the 1970s (beginning with the Iranian hostage crisis) can be understood within a larger historical context. As some have argued, they can be seen as "blowback": reactions and resistances to America's global power. They manifest peripheral disorder brought about by the logics of America's own informal empire. One recent study, for example, shows that transnational terrorism rose during the 1970s and continued to rise through the 1980s and 1990s – exactly

in the wake of America's informal imperial interventions.[81] Second, and more important, America's new imperialism was not only about responding to terrorism. Many of America's militaristic ventures – from Panama in 1989 to Iraq in 1991, or Bosnia and Haiti in the 1990s – were not responses to terrorist threats. This suggests that understanding America's new imperialism demands an examination of more than terrorism.

Nutmeg and Prestige

Examine first America's counterpart to Britain's invasion of Abyssinia in 1867: the invasion of Grenada in 1983. This was the beginning of America's new imperialism, just as Abyssinia was for Britain. In the case of Grenada, clearly terrorism was not the driving force of this invasion. The official line of the Reagan administration was that the invasion was necessary for protecting the lives of American students and citizens in the country amidst internal disorder. The other reason was to stamp out Communism: The Marxist-Leninist New Jewel Movement, or NJM, had seized power. Other factors, however, were at work besides these. One has to do with economic decline, more specifically as it was felt in the form of rising unemployment and a falling profit rate in key sectors of the American economy since the mid-1970s. To deal with this situation, the Reagan administration sought ways to increase profitability. One was military build-up. By the end of the decade, about $300 billion had gone to the military; the profit rate on defense contracts outran profitability in durable goods manufacturing.[82] The other tactic was deregulation. This had begun already under President Jimmy Carter, but Reagan took it to new heights. The final tactic was to look abroad and increase foreign investment. The Reagan administration hoped to find new outlets abroad for American capital, and one part of the strategy was aimed at the Caribbean. In 1982, the year before the Grenada invasion, the Reagan administration announced the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI), which was aimed at providing aid and liberalizing the region.

The invasion of Grenada must be situated within this larger economic scene. Reagan's strategy of military build-up needed justification. Dov S. Zakheim, an official in the Department of Defense, explained the invasion as important for that reason exactly. It helped signal "a major step toward recovery from the Vietnam syndrome" and thereby served as a counterpart to Congress's insistence on reducing the military budget.[83] Furthermore, the threat of Communism (with Cuba nearby and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua) was not only a geopolitical matter but also an economic one. It posed a potential challenge to Reagan's regional liberalization strategy. If Communist regimes like NJM spread, fields for America investment would contract. Fittingly, soon after the invasion, the U.S. Agency for International Development reported that Grenada was "ripe for investors." U.S. aid to the country resumed and foreign capital

[81] Enders and Sandler (2000).
[82] Bernstein (1994), p. 23.
[83] Zakheim (1986), p. 179.

flooded the country.[84] Reagan visited Grenada in 1986, using it as a platform to announce a policy of enlarging the CBI and increasing investment by American firms in apparel industries across the region.[85]

Beyond economics, there was another issue. In 1983, Reagan publicly stated that "it isn't nutmeg that's at stake in the Caribbean and Central America; it is the United States' national security."[86] Presumably this meant that the Communist threat was the fundamental cause of the invasion, but in reality there was more to it. For the USSR, Grenada was but a "raindrop in the swimming pool."[87] The real issue was not the USSR specifically, but American strength in the world more generally. Vietnam had been lost seven years earlier. The Iranian hostage crisis still haunted Washington, DC. And just two days before Reagan made the decision to send troops to Grenada, he had received news of the Lebanon truck bombing that killed hundreds of U.S. Marines and additional French servicemen. The United States appeared to be weakening in strength. Combined with the economic problems and America's larger decline relative to other industrialized countries, the United States as a world power and leader was put into question.

The assault on Grenada followed from these combined economic and geopolitical pressures. Not only did the invasion and ouster of the NJM facilitate the Reagan administration's broader regional strategy for reinvigorating American capital (and justifying the military budget), it was also a strategy for restoring America's prestige amidst its putative decline. Officials in the Reagan administration were reported as stating that "the Reagan Administration's overriding reason for invading Grenada was to keep the US from being perceived as a 'paper tiger' in the eyes of both friendly and hostile Latin American nations." One senior official said, "if we said no [to the invasion], not only might there have been another Iran with the American students . . . but no one would have taken us seriously any more down there."[88] Vice President George Bush bragged at the Republican national convention in 1984: "Because President Reagan stood firm in defense of freedom [in Grenada], America has regained respect throughout the world."[89] Later commentaries and stories confirm these claims. Richard Haas, who would later serve under then Vice President George H. W. Bush, admitted that the invasion was not just about stopping Communism, but also "to show that the United States could still act effectively in the world in the aftermath of the Beirut debacle."[90] The invasion was also popular domestically: All polls showed that Reagan's popularity increased after the invasion.[91] In these ways, the invasion of Grenada

[84] Quoted in Shorrock (1984).
[85] Library of Congress Federal Research Division (2005), Appendix B.
[86] Quoted in Williams (2002), p. 661.
[87] Maynes (1986), p. 187.
[88] Gwertzman (1983), p. 1.
[89] *New York Times*, Aug. 22, 1984.
[90] Haas (1999), p. 25; Nardin and Pritchard (1990), p. 1.
[91] Zakheim (1986), p. 180.

was similar to Britain's invasion of Abyssinia not just because it marked the beginning of a resurgent imperialism, but also because the forces animating the invasion were systematically connected to economic decline.

Decline, the New Geopolitics, and Peripheral Instability

What about the other instances of America's new imperialism? It helps to begin by elaborating on the situation the United States faced amidst its economic decline. As noted, one aspect of the new context was global economic competition. The United States saw rising competition from emerging economic rivals: first Germany and Japan; by the 1990s the EU; and China by the very end of the century. But beyond this – and related to it – were other developments constituting a climate not unlike the one faced by Britain a century earlier. One development was new geopolitical competition. First, in the face of decline, America's relations with Western Europe took on a new tone. America's economic competitiveness was challenged by Europe's economic growth, but the end of the Cold War made the issue more challenging. The Cold War had provided the United States with significant political leverage over Europe. It had given justification for America's military power and economic hegemony, and served as the basis for a "social compact" between the United States and the European capitalist states. The United States delivered peace and security in exchange for European deference.[92] The end of the Cold War upended that justification and hence America's "crucial lever for hegemony."[93] In addition, the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, which turned the European Economic Community (EEC) into the European Union, not only mounted a further economic challenge (by creating a common market and currency), but also a political challenge. It created new institutions like the Council of Ministers and the European Commission that could advance common security and foreign policy frameworks across Europe, potentially against America's interests. At the same time, Germany and France announced a plan to form an all-European military corps.

That these events posed a potential threat to America's interest is seen clearly in the thinking of American defense planners and policy advisors. As early as 1991, National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft complained about the meetings among Western European countries prefiguring the EU. He was concerned that they were discussing security issues without American participation.[94] Similarly, in response to the Franco-German Eurocorps, Bush administration officials feared that it "undercut the whole American *raison d'être* in Europe."[95]

[92] Hence "continental Europe generally followed wherever America led. And it did so because America's nuclear shield and America's promotion of global economic expansion enabled it to deliver on its promissory notes of peace and prosperity to a continent that had known neither for four decades." McCormick (2004), p. 77. See also Lundestad (1986) and Layne (2006), pp. 107–9.

[93] McCormick (2004), p. 81.

[94] Carpenter (1999).

[95] Clarke (1992), p. 4.

A secret Pentagon report in 1992 stated that the United States "must account sufficiently for the interests of the advanced industrial nations to discourage them from seeking to overturn the established political and economic order," and thus should "maintain the mechanism for deterring potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global role." It identified "Western Europe" as one such competitor, stressing that it has "resources . . . sufficient to generate global power." Therefore, the report concluded, it "is of fundamental importance to preserve NATO as the primary instrument of Western defense and security" and "prevent the emergence of European-only security arrangements which would undermine NATO."[96] The fear was echoed throughout Washington. The creation of the EU and its integration of national powers threatened the United States just as, more than one hundred years earlier, America's own post–Civil War union and German and Italian reunification had posed a threat to Britain.[97]

The question of Western Europe was also tied to the rising threat of Russia and the place of both within the larger question of "Eurasia." As the Cold War ended, the American foreign policy establishment conjured frightful images of a new imperial Russia. Fretting over scenarios painted by Mackinder's traditional "heartland" theory, they worried about Russia's geographic position next to vast natural energy reserves and its thousands of nuclear warheads. Strategists at the Naval War College thus stressed that the main geopolitical imperative in the post–Cold War world was to prevent "the rise of a hegemon capable of dominating the Eurasian continental realm and of challenging the United States in the maritime realm."[98] The 1992 Department of Defense plan warned that Russia retains "the most military potential in all of Eurasia." Russia will "remain the strongest military power in Eurasia and the only power in the world with the capability of destroying the United States."[99] Zbigniew Brzezinski in 1997 added that "America's global primacy is directly dependent on how long and how effectively its preponderance on the Eurasian continent is sustained"; but that preponderance on the Eurasian continent was also dependent on American power in Europe.[100] "The United States' ability to project influence and power in Eurasia relies on close transatlantic ties."[101]

The other development lay in the periphery. The 1970s and 1980s not only marked the beginnings of American decline. These were also years when America's preceding informal empire and the attendant geopolitical structure began to show signs of fissure. The issue extended beyond barbarians at the gate. It was about the breakdown of America's client regimes. Popular protests

[96] Gellman (1992), p. A1.
[97] Kupchan (2003), pp. 3–17.
[98] Mackubin Thomas Owens quoted in Foster (2006).
[99] Tyler (1992), p. 14.
[100] Brzezinski (1998), p. 30.
[101] Brzezinski (1997), p. 53.

and mass movements threatened to unseat American-supported dictators, from Duvalier in Haiti to Marcos in the Philippines. This was partially concomitant with the "third wave" of democratization beginning in the 1970s and carrying through the 1980s. Democratization in part implied a potential breakdown in American-supported authoritarian regimes.[102] The overall slowdown of the global economy in the 1970s and the subsequent debt crisis in the 1980s did not make things any easier. Around the globe, the ideology of postcolonial "developmentalism" fell apart, as so-called developing countries saw internal disorder and declining standards of living. The relative stability created by America's informal empire "gave way to disintegrating order, simmering discontents, and unchanneled radical temperaments."[103] The Middle East was one such site where unruly forces were unleashed. The late 1970s and 1980s saw the Iranian revolution and the seizure of American hostages in Iran, PLO terrorism and the Lebanon War, and the Iraq-Iran War.

America's economic activities abroad laid down the conditions for further peripheral problems. In the midst of falling profit rates at home, American businesses and the political elite increasingly looked abroad. The American state sought to facilitate investment through new trade agreements in the region – often as defensive moves against European and Asian trading blocs – such as the Caribbean Basin Initiative (which was expanded into the U.S.-Caribbean Basin Trade Partnership Act) and the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement in 1988 (a prelude to NAFTA in 1994).[104] It also pushed countries in the Global South to liberalize their economies, encouraging structural adjustment programs that would open up fresh fields for investment.[105] Fittingly, the amount of American foreign direct investment abroad since the 1980s grew dramatically and continued through the 1990s (see Table 5.1). This growth in U.S. foreign investment was similar to Britain's increasing turn to foreign investment in the late nineteenth century when Britain also underwent economic decline.

The end of the Cold War raised even more possibilities for peripheral instability. When combined with the breakdown of developmentalism and the debt crises of the 1980s, the discipline over peripheral regimes became undone, and former clients were invited to be more recalcitrant to superpower dictates than before. The break-up of the Soviet Union itself posed trouble, unleashing nationalist sentiments, secessionism, and "long pent-up centrifugal forces."[106] By 1997, the Central Intelligence Agency's National Intelligence Council was worrying about the potential for nationalist revolutionary forces in the new Russia that might take power and work against U.S. interests. Its report also noted instability all around the world. It warned that "most conflicts today are internal, not between states" and that "this tendency will continue." The report

[102] On the "third wave," see Huntington (1991).
[103] [Wallerstein, 2002 #1328], p. 64.
[104] Hill (2003).
[105] Babb (2009).
[106] Bacevich (2002), p. 61.

TABLE 5.1. *U.S. Direct Investment Abroad 1990–1998, in billions dollars**

Destination	1990	1993	1996	1998
Europe	214,739	285,735	389,378	489,539
Asia & Pacific	254,889	92,671	139,548	161,797
Latin America	43,348	59,302	155,925	196,655
Africa	3,690	5,469	8,162	13,491
Middle East	3,959	6,571	8,294	10,599

* "Direct Investment Abroad" defined as ownership or control by one U.S. person of 10 percent or more of the voting securities of an incorporated foreign business enterprise or an equivalent interest in a unincorporated foreign business enterprise.

Source: Orig. United States Bureau of the Census 1999, *Statistical Abstract* 119th ed., p. 797.

astutely worried that with such conflict and breakdown comes the "potential for outside intervention."[107]

The context of American decline was thus very similar to that in which Britain began its descent. Economic decline carried periods of downturn at home, but it also meant global economic competition and the added threat of alternative economic and political regional centers. And as America's economic hegemony began to wither, so too did the geopolitical order that American informal empire had helped to create and tried to contain. It is in this context that the United States stepped up its imperialistic activity, not only in Grenada, but elsewhere.

From Panama to the Balkans

To see this more clearly, consider the 1989 Panama invasion. The invasion, or "Operation Just Cause," was ostensibly precipitated by Gen. Manuel Noriega's illicit activities and his harassment of American soldiers. But Noriega had long been a close ally of American agencies. He had worked with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), had allies in the Department of Defense (DOD), and had been on the CIA payroll.[108] When he had abused his power, Washington had typically turned a blind eye.[109] But things got out of control. Beginning in the mid-1980s, Noriega heightened his repression of dissidents, thereby inciting popular protests across the country and a massive demonstration of 100,000 people in Panama City. He was also indicted for racketeering, drug trafficking, and money laundering – activities that did not have the Reagan administration's consent.

[107] National Intelligence Council (1997).
[108] Gilboa (1995–1996), p. 541.
[109] Ibid., pp. 541–2.

As Noriega continued to prove intransigent to American designs, he posed international trouble.[110] With the Soviet Union crumbling, the question of America's future status as a sole superpower capable of imposing a new discipline on the international system was being raised. As one expert put it, "If the United States could not handle a low-level dictator in a country where it maintained bases and large forces, how would it be able to deal with far more serious international challenges?"[111] The invasion of Panama, with its overwhelming use of force, was thus like the invasion of Grenada, however in a post–Cold War context. The power of the American military was summoned not only to deal with a resistant client, but also to help demonstrate America's power in a perilously changing world.

Even the use of American military force to reinstall Aristide in Haiti in 1994 can be understood within the context of hegemonic decline. On the one hand, the reinstallation was predicated on a breakdown of clientelism. The clientelistic relationship had plagued successive American administrations ever since the second Duvalierian regime (of Jean-Claude Duvalier, or "Baby Doc") began to crumble under the weight of domestic instability and popular protest. Aristide rode that wave of populism, but his fiery leftist and anti-U.S. rhetoric did not win him friends in Washington. The American-supported elections in 1990 were a pragmatic compromise: The Bush administration hoped that elections would subdue social disorder and elevate former World Bank official Marc Bazin into office, thereby replacing one client (Duvalier) with another (Bazin). However, Aristide's victory took Washington by surprise. The CIA waged a covert campaign to discredit him, while the Bush administration gave de facto support to the bloody coup led by General Raoul Cédras.[112] What followed was yet more popular protest, violent repression of pro-Aristide forces, and widespread international attention, as well as a refugee problem produced by the crisis. The Clinton administration was finally pressed to adopt a strategy of reinstalling Aristide while nonetheless aiming to discipline him and make him a more amenable client.

Although peripheral instability played a part in the installation of Aristide, America's economic interests played a role as well. One of the reasons why the United States took such an interest in the internal affairs of Haiti in the first place was that Haiti had been a critical site for the post-1970s strategy of exporting capital to manage falling profitability at home. The Caribbean Basin Initiative touted Haiti as one of its models.[113] Clinton's decision to send troops to Haiti was made in the same year that it announced plans to build on the CBI by extending NAFTA to the whole hemisphere (through the Free Trade of the Americas initiative). These plans, deemed by strategists as critical for managing hegemonic decline, were threatened by unrest and political disorder

[110] Bill McAllister, "Bush Vows to Press Noriega," *Washington Post*, Dec. 23, 1988.
[111] Gilboa (1995–1996), p. 559. See also Cramer (2006), p. 195.
[112] Morley and McGillion (1997), pp. 364–7.
[113] Robinson (1996), p. 270.

in Haiti. "If the international and hemispheric community allows thugs such as Raul Cedras, Michel Francois, and Phillipe Biamby to continue to rob and terrorize the people of Haiti," stated Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, "that country is likely to become a haven and a breeding ground for the forces of instability and criminality in the region."[114]

Aristide had to return to power lest America's economic plans were unraveled. Upon announcing his plan to end the embargo against Haiti, Clinton declared: "I want to do more than lift the embargo; I want to help rebuild the economy of Haiti. That would be good for America."[115] The president of International Industrial Exporters, Inc., a major transnational corporation dealing in contracting in Haiti, explained his support of Clinton's plan to restore Aristide to power as follows: "Mr. Aristide isn't any more the answer to Haiti's problems than is the military. But his return to power is worth the cost of the U.S. military incursion if it fosters a resumption of free trade and the sale of U.S. goods and services."[116] It followed that the reinstallation of Aristide by the hand of the American military came with a host of stringent conditions, including a new structural adjustment program.[117] Financial aid would help secure Aristide as a client. U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott was unabashed: "Even after our exit in February 1996 we will remain in charge by means of the USAID and the private sector."[118] In turn, Aristide would restore stability and help the American state try to realize its regional strategy for managing its economic woes.

Whereas Haiti and Panama were within America's traditional sphere of influence, the Balkans were not. What explains America's successive interventions there in the 1990s? Peripheral instability was the spark. The integrity of Yugoslavia had been maintained by both the United States and the USSR, but the end of the Cold War unleashed intra-Yugoslavian conflict. This in itself solicited interest from the big powers. But if local disorder was the spark, geopolitical concerns in the context of decline fanned the flames. The reason why intervention in Yugoslavia was so important to the United States, and why it took the form of U.S.-led NATO operations, had to do with America's relationship with the European Union.

As noted, the Cold War had provided the United States with its primary justification for its military presence in Europe in the form of NATO, and hence for Europe's dependence on the United States, but the end of the Cold War threatened to unsettle this dependent relationship. Why should Europe depend on the United States if the Communist threat had been effectively tamed? Why should Europe continue with the NATO alliance? Why not form

[114] Strobe Talbott, "Pursuing the Restoration of Democracy in Haiti," speech, U.S. Department of State Dispatch, May 23, 1994.
[115] Quoted in Dow (1995), p. 15.
[116] Quoted in Robinson (1996), pp. 306–7.
[117] Hallward (2004), pp. 29–30; Manegold (1994).
[118] Quoted in Robinson (1996), p. 311.

a new European-based security apparatus outside the control of the American state? These questions plagued planners and policy makers in Washington in the early 1990s. Rightfully so. An end to American-controlled NATO would spell the end of American political hegemony in the region and enable new political-economic rivals to consolidate, grow, and expand. This was all the more terrifying given the increasing economic weight of the European Union, Russia, and China (which might ally with Russia).[119] Accordingly, a Pentagon paper in 1992 had declared that "Our strategy [after the fall of the Soviet Union] must refocus on precluding the emergence of any potential future global competitor."[120] As Western Europe was deemed by many in Washington as one such possible competitor from the Eurasia region, the continuance of NATO was critical. "A new Europe is still taking shape," Brzezinski stressed, "and if that Europe is to remain part of the 'Euro-Atlantic' space, the expansion of NATO is essential."[121] The real trick was to keep NATO intact while also ensuring U.S. control over it.[122]

The decision to intervene in Bosnia and the subsequent campaigns in the latter part of the decade followed from these considerations. Before the first campaign, Air Force Chief of Staff General Michael J. Dugan wrote in the *New York Times* that a "win in the Balkans would establish U.S. leadership in the post-Cold War world in a way that Operation Desert Storm never could."[123] In 1997, after the first 1995 campaign (but before the 1999 Kosovo operation), a document circulating in the CIA stated that the first intervention had created the exact outcome pinpointed by Dugan: "European publics will continue to support the US military presence in Europe, partly as a hedge against Russia and renationalization of defenses, and as a result of NATO's entry into the Bosnia imbroglio – a step that reaffirmed the effectiveness of the Alliance in managing post-Cold war crises. Europeans will not find anything sacrosanct about the number of US forces stationed in their countries – their views of American leadership will be determined less by the size of the American presence than by the use of these forces for combined operations."[124] As former Colonel Andrew Bacevich eloquently concludes, it is clear that Operation Allied Force "was neither planned nor conducted to alleviate the plight of the Kosovars. . . . The intent . . . was to provide an object lesson to any European state fancying that it was exempt from the rules of the post–Cold War era. It was not Kosovo that counted, but affirming the dominant position of the United States" in Europe.[125]

Hitched to these concerns were direct economic interests. Europe had been a vital site for American exports. As Secretary of State Warren Christopher

[119] Brzezinski (1998), pp. 10, 198. See also Gowan (1999); Bacevich (2002); Layne (2006).
[120] Quoted in Bellamy Foster (2006), p. 3.
[121] Brzezinski (1997), p. 55.
[122] Bacevich (2002), pp. 103–7.
[123] "Operation Balkan Storm: Here's a Plan," *New York Times*, Nov. 29, 1992, p. E11.
[124] National Intelligence Council (1997).
[125] Bacevich (2002), pp. 104–5.

stressed in 1995, "all told, Europe accounts for almost half of the foreign revenues of American firms. Our investment in Europe alone roughly equals that in the rest of the world put together."[126] A loss of standing in Europe, continued instability in the region, or the formation of a rival trading bloc would be disastrous for the American economy. Former director of the NSA William Odum warned in 1992 that "failure to act effectively in Yugoslavia will not only affect US security interests but also US economic interests. Our economic interdependency with Western Europe creates large numbers of American jobs."[127] Stability in Europe was necessary for maintaining the profitability of American capital amidst the threat of economic decline; ending the Bosnia crisis was necessary for that stability.[128] Just before the bombing campaign in Kosovo in 1999, President Clinton said so. He told an audience of local government employees of the AFL-CIO: "[I]f we're going to have a strong economic relationship that includes our ability to sell around the world, Europe has got to be a key.... That's what this Kosovo thing is all about."[129] Senator Richard Lugar (R-Indiana) hit the nail on the head. He said he supported intervention in Bosnia because "there will be devastating economic effects in Europe of a spread of war and, thus, the loss of jobs in this country *as we try to base a recovery upon our export potential*.'"[130]

America's approach to the African continent offers an informative contrast. As Andrew Bacevich points out, Africa saw instability and disorder throughout this period, just like the Balkans, Central America, and the Caribbean. Yet U.S. intervention there involved small deployments (Somalia) or missile strikes (against the Al Shifa pharmaceutical factory in Khartoum in response to the terrorist bombing of U.S. diplomatic missions in Tanzania and Kenya).[131] These deployments did not involve the same amount of military power deployed in Panama, Haiti, or the Balkans. Nor did they necessitate continued visits. The crisis in Haiti conjured American deployments not only in 1994 but also in 2004. The Balkans called for two major interventions in the 1990s. America's hand in Africa, however, was minimal. Why? The answer is that Africa was not important in the context of American decline. Although certain raw materials had been seen as essential for America's economic base in the mid-twentieth century, many of those raw materials had lost their vitality as alternative technologies and new industries emerged. Unlike Europe or the south of the Western hemisphere, therefore, it was not part of the American state's plan for economic recovery amidst America's economic fall. The Clinton administration had hoped that, one day, the African continent and its "700 million

[126] Christopher (1995), p. 468.
[127] Quoted in Layne (1997), p. 100.
[128] U.S. investment in Europe "increased sevenfold between 1994 and 1998" and "trade between the United States and the European Union also rose handsomely, to $450 billion per year." Bacevich (2002), p. 105.
[129] Quoted in ibid., p. 105.
[130] Quoted in Layne (1997), p. 100.
[131] Bacevich (2002), p. 108.

consumers" might serve as a fruitful field for American products, but the fact remained that the entire continent only made for 1 percent of total U.S. trade in the 1990s. Whereas U.S. direct investment in Europe reached $389,378 million and in Latin America $155,925 million in 1996, it was a mere $8,162 million in Africa.[132] Given these figures, it should not be surprising that instability in Africa warranted minimal concern.

Iraq in Context

We can now put Iraq into a new light. Like the foregoing cases, American intervention in Iraq was the result of a conjunction of factors particular to the context of decline. The first factor was peripheral instability brought on by the logics of informal imperialism. Before Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, he had been a client of the United States. After Iraq and Iran had begun their war in 1980, the Reagan administration decided to enlist Hussein as an ally. The United States sent financial aid, agricultural exports, and military intelligence. Reagan also sent a presidential envoy (Donald Rumsfeld, then head of a major multinational pharmaceutical firm) to consult with Hussein and his regime.[133] Iran conceded defeat in 1988 and American support continued. Until at least 1990, U.S. firms sold aircraft to the regime; the U.S. government approved licenses for American firms to sell biological products and electronics equipment to Iraqi missile-producing plants; and under George H. W. Bush agricultural credits to Iraq were doubled to $1 billion a year.[134] Yet Hussein overstepped his bounds by invading Kuwait. In part, the logics of clientelism help explain the action: Hussein had previously sent "feelers" to the Bush administration to get a sense of how the United States would respond to an invasion. The responses were ambiguous. Although Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney responded that the United States would not take kindly to an invasion of Kuwait, the U.S. State Department and the U.S. ambassador implied that the United States would not take an opposed stance.[135] In any case, Hussein did invade Kuwait, and this created a scenario that called for some kind of U.S. action.

The reasons why the action took the form of a massive military strike are twofold. The first has to do with oil. This might be obvious, but it was not so simple as U.S. oil interests hoping to tap Kuwait. Rather, the threat was that Iraq might monopolize oil reserves in the Gulf. Washington feared that Iraq, by taking Kuwait, would not only have its own oil and Kuwaiti oil but also Saudi Arabia's oil. In such an event, Iraq would control a majority of the region's oil reserves. This was the frightful scenario of a single "oil hegemon"; to the power establishment in Washington, it was simply impermissible.[136] The possibility

[132] United States Bureau of the Census (1999), p. 797.
[133] Mearsheimer and Walt (2003), p. 56; Battle (2003).
[134] Simons (1996), pp. 317–19. See also Selfa (1999).
[135] Mearsheimer and Walt (2003), p. 54.
[136] Layne (2006), p. 178–9.

seemed real to U.S. officials. It is now known that the United States had made contingency plans to invade the Middle East as a result of the oil embargo of 1973.[137] The invasion of Kuwait appeared to be a similar contingency. Richard Haas, who received a Presidential Medal for his role in developing the invasion plan (he was the Special Assistant to Bush the Elder and National Security Council Senior Director for Near East and South Asian Affairs), thought so for sure. He said that the invasion of Kuwait raised fears in the administration that "Iraq was preparing to invade Saudi Arabia. Even if not, it was thought that an Iraq that controlled Kuwait could intimidate Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states – and as a result dominate the world's energy markets." Therefore, an overriding objective of the invasion was to maintain "the security and stability of Saudi Arabia and the entire Gulf region." Among the more "immediate concerns" guiding the invasion, he said, were "energy interests and the well-being of America's traditional friends in the Middle East."[138]

There is, however, a final factor. This helps explain not only the decision to use force but also the fact that the use of force was so overwhelming – the largest deployment in the Middle East perhaps since World War II: that is, a symbolic display to maintain America's global position amidst potential charges of decline. In part, the display was a signal to Europe that it still needed American patronage. According to the historian Thomas McCormick, the 1991 invasion was not just an attack on Iraq but simultaneously a de facto policy toward Europe. It was a "'resource war' to remind Europe that it still needed America to maintain access to global raw materials in a post–Cold War world." The subsequent air strikes under Clinton served a similar function, acting "as a continuing reminder to EU nations (and Japan) that they still needed American protection to maintain the stability of the Persian Gulf region and its oil production, on which they depended."[139] At the same time, the war was a signal to American publics and the world more generally that the United States was not in fact in decline, that its military power could effectively maintain America's dominance, and that countries like Germany and Japan would not be able to overtake America. Casting out Saddam Hussein's army from Kuwait would "showcase the capabilities and competence of the US military"; it would not only justify the military build-up of the preceding decade, but also "demonstrate the utility of American military power, now outside the context of the Cold War." According to Colonel Bacevich, who was posted in the Gulf, "this would validate America's continuing capacity to exercise global leadership – thereby giving lie to the forecasts, then much in fashion, that the United States faced imminent decline, its standing soon to be eclipsed by economic powerhouses like Japan or a just-reunified Germany."[140] In the aftermath of the wildly successful operation, President George H. W.

[137] "Britain Says U.S. Planned to Seize Oil in '73 Crisis'" *New York Times*, Jan. 4, 2004, A6.
[138] Haas (1999), pp. 32–3.
[139] McCormick (2004), pp. 83–4.
[140] Bacevich (2002), pp. 58–9.

Bush began speaking of a "new world order": a world order that was to depend on America's leadership and patronage. If the United States could not dominate economically, at least it could dominate militarily.

The subsequent invasion of Iraq in 2003 in the wake of September 11 revealed the fissures of that new world order. It is already clear that terrorism and the threat of weapons of mass destruction were pretexts at best. At issue was control over oil. Oil had been at issue in 1991 too, but now the threat of a rival oil hegemon was even more frightening. For one thing, given that the September 11 terrorists were from Saudi Arabia, the United States faced the threat of having to eventually terminate its relations with its long-standing oil client. For another, the rapid rise of China had finally put it on Washington's list of potential alternative power centers. Already in 2000, the chairman of the National Intelligence Council declared: "[T]he real question, then, is not whether China will be a major regional power, but rather how big a power it will be and, more importantly, how China will use its power."[141] Later, in 2003, the year the U.S. invasion of Iraq was unleashed, the Council on Foreign Relations tried to downplay China's capabilities, asserting that it was decades behind the United States in terms of military power. But by then China's economic growth had already fanned fears among officials in Bush the Younger's administration of the rise of a Eurasian superpower capable of overtaking the United States once and for all.[142] And the Institute for International Economics, which had on its board prominent economic strategists like Paul Volcker and Larry Summers, warned of an "East Asian economic bloc that could create a tripolar world economy, with significant geopolitical as well as economic implications for the United States."[143]

These economic and strategic concerns regarding China were only further fueled by Russia's "strategic relationship" – as the National Intelligence Council called it – with China, which included the sale of Russian technology and weapons. Attendant with this fear was Russia's own bid for regional power, manifested in part by its continual attempts to gain oil and natural gas from the Caspian region.[144] Even the *Economist* magazine took note, warning in 1999 that China and Russia would work together to gain preferential control over the energy-rich Caspian Sea basin. The following year, in 2000, a National Intelligence Council report forecasted possible global scenarios that could unfold by 2015. One of them was that "China, India, and Russia form a defacto geo-strategic alliance in an attempt to counterbalance U.S. and Western influence."[145]

Many scholars across the political spectrum have argued that the Iraq invasion was motivated in light of these Eurasian economic and political threats.

[141] Gannon (2000).
[142] Donnelly, Kagan, and Schmitt (2000).
[143] Bergsten and Institute for International Economics (2005), esp. p. xviii.
[144] National Intelligence Council (2001).
[145] National Intelligence Council (2000), p. 81.

David Harvey (2003) notes that a permanent U.S. presence in Iraq would provide a new site for controlling oil that, in turn, would provide the United States with "a powerful U.S. military bridgehead on the Eurasian land mass." This would give the United States a "powerful geostrategic position in Eurasia with at least the potentiality to disrupt any consolidation of a Eurasian power."[146] The Chinese economy, after all, depends on foreign oil. Any future Chinese military force would also depend on foreign oil. In *The American Conservative*, Anthony Layne thus argues:

> The real reason the administration went to war had nothing to do with terrorism. . . . The administration went to war in Iraq to consolidate America's global hegemony and to extend U.S. dominance to the Middle East by establishing a permanent military stronghold in Iraq for the purposes of controlling the Middle Eastern oil spigot (thereby giving Washington enormous leverage in its relations with Western Europe and China); allowing Washington to distance itself from an increasingly unreliable and unstable Saudi Arabia; and using the shadow of U.S. military power to bring about additional regime changes in Iran and Syria.

Without access to administration documents, it is difficult to conclusively assess these arguments. Yet the facts already available speak volumes. The first is that, before the 2003 invasion, policy makers with experience in the Gulf were already forecasting the need for future American intervention. Richard Haas wrote in 1999 that the use of American military force was imminent because "vital U.S. interests would suffer sharply were the Persian Gulf to fall under the sway of a hostile Iran or Iraq."[147] The second is that Iraq's oil reserves, thought to be the second largest in the world, amount to five times the total in the United States and remain the least explored of the world's oil-rich areas. Only two thousand wells have been drilled in Iraq, whereas a million have been drilled in Texas alone.[148] The third is that, despite all talk of a temporary occupation, after the invasion the United States initiated the construction of massive military bases in Iraq that the Pentagon referred to as "enduring bases." By 2007, at least five self-sufficient bases were under way. One of them, reported in the *Washington Post*, is the Balad Air Base, which has a miniature golf course, a cinema, a football field, and a neighborhood called "KBR-land," named after a Halliburton subsidiary. All of the bases have been built far away from major urban centers but close enough to have "power projection capacity," that is, potentially capable of hitting regional targets outside Iraq.[149] Fourth, the Bush administration pushed the Iraqi government to pass a new law for dealing with the distribution of oil revenues. The U.S. version of such a law ceded nearly all the oil to Western companies, making it the most open to foreign control

[146] Harvey (2003), p. 85.
[147] Haas (1999), p. 127.
[148] Holt (2007), p. 3.
[149] Ricks (2006).

compared with the nationalized controls exercised by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iran.[150]

There are thus parallels and precursors. In more than one sense, America's military deployments in the Middle East at the turn of the twenty-first century replayed the scramble for Africa one hundred years earlier. They were part of a wider struggle to control raw materials vital for the world economy. The only difference is that whereas Africa had been the site of much of Britain's new imperialism in the late nineteenth century, one hundred years later the strategic site of concern had shifted to other regions – in this case the Middle East. But beyond this difference the overarching similarity remains. Both Britain's and America's new imperialisms were unleashed during the two states' period of decline and heightened global competition because, in several respects, they were responses to decline and heightened competition. They do not represent the work of powerful empires flexing their muscles, but rather ailing hegemons tactically trying to ward off impending doom. Rather than feats of strength, they are acts of desperation amidst the threat of final demise.

[150] Juhasz (2007).

6

The Dynamics of Imperialism

> The Eastern nations sink, their glory ends, And empire rises where the sun descends.
>
> – Inscription on rock in Monument Bay, Plymouth MA

In 1879, the British sociologist Herbert Spencer wrote to liberal parliamentarian and free trader John Bright. Urging him to support a new Anti-Aggression League, Spencer bemoaned the "aggressive tendencies displayed by us all over the world – picking quarrels with native races and taking possession of their land."[1] Decades later V. I. Lenin referred to a similar process. He spoke of the "tremendous 'boom' in colonial conquests" by the British state that had begun in the late nineteenth century.[2] Of course, Spencer and Lenin were speaking of Britain's "new imperialism," about which we already know. Occurring in the context of Britain's economic decline, it marked a new aggression on the part of the British state. We also know about the American counterpart to this. In the 1980s, in the context of its own economic decline, the American state too embarked on a new path of direct imperialism. Both states shifted their imperial modalities and intensity; they become more bold, direct, and aggressive.

However, the fact that both the British and American states embarked on new imperialisms should not be the end of our story. It merely invites us to consider larger historical dynamics. The fact that both states initiated new imperialisms intimates the possibility of older imperialisms. It suggests the possibility of imperial shifts or transformations over longer periods of time. It intimates a story about imperial states sometimes becoming more violent and bold and sometimes more restrained and less direct. The new imperialisms might just be fragments of a larger pattern of imperial expansion and contraction, relative stability and renewed assertion, and imperial stagnation and growth.

[1] Spencer to Bright quoted in Wiltshire (1978), p. 91.
[2] Lenin (1964), p. 256.

TABLE 6.1. *Patterns of Imperial Aggression by Historical Phase, U.K. and U.S. Empires*

Phase	Imperial Modality
Ascent UK: 1730–1815 US: 1803–1945	Expansion: Direct Imperialism/Heightened Aggression
Hegemonic Victory/Maturity UK: 1816–1873 US: 1945–1973	Abatement: Relative decrease in Direct Imperialism/Aggression
Competition/Decline UK: 1874–1939 US: 1973–present	Reassertion: Direct Imperialism/Heightened Aggression

This chapter explores such imperial shifts over time. Whereas previous chapters have looked at specific phases or moments in the two empires' histories, this chapter looks at the bigger picture. It illuminates overarching patterns, processes, and dynamics over the course of the two states' modern imperial histories. It locates a historical structure to imperialism. Since the fall of the Rome, it has become a cliché to speak roundly about the rise, decline, and fall of empires. This chapter does something different: It speaks about the ups and downs of imperialistic aggression.

The Phases of Empire

In previous chapters, we have seen the British and American empires' respective ascendancies to global power, their colonial policies and regimes, their preferred modalities of imperialism during their respective hegemonic phases, and their new imperialisms during their periods of decline. If we put these discrete stories together into a larger whole, however, we can induce a larger historical pattern. The pattern consists of three phases: imperial expansion, abatement, and reassertion. These phases roughly correspond with the two states' phases of ascendancy, hegemonic maturity, and decline (see Table 6.1).

To elaborate: The first phase occurred as the British and American states ascended toward global economic dominance. As seen in Chapter 1, during this period the two states' respective paths to global preeminence were paved by youthful imperial aggression. This aggression took the form of bold territorial conquests and military power to secure the conquests, expand trading networks, and protect borders. Britain expanded in the Americas and then into parts of Africa and Asia. Similarly, the United States reached westward in the Americas and took possessions in the Caribbean and the Asia-Pacific. The next phase of the sequence occurred during the two states' periods of

hegemonic maturity. As seen in Chapter 3, in this phase, the two states' territorial expansion slowed if not stagnated entirely, and they resorted to informal imperialism. Rather than continuing to conquer colonies, both states preferred to cultivate clients. For instance, just as the British state preferred to establish allied sovereign dependencies in Latin America rather than ruling them as colonies, so did the United States cultivate its covert machinery to silently topple regimes rather than invade them. In short, as the two hegemons reaped the fruits of economic dominance in the world, both states opted for indirect means of exercising influence.

The final phase occurred during the two states' respective periods of hegemonic decline. In this phase, both states reasserted themselves in the world with new vigor. Facing increasing competition from rivals and new economic troubles, the British and American states became more and more aggressive in their imperial tactics. As we learned in previous chapters, the form of this aggression differed: The British empire became more aggressive through formal imperialism as well as militarism, whereas the U.S. empire's reassertion took the form of military invasion, air strikes, or temporary military occupations. But whatever the particular form, both states became more overtly and directly imperialistic in this period.

We can detect this overarching pattern of expansion, abatement, and reassertion by looking at quantitative data. Even if they do not tell us everything, numbers sometimes speak. The numbers here affirm the historical narrative of preceding chapters. Consider the number of colonies seized by the British state per year (i.e., the rate of British colonization). This offers a good indicator of Britain's imperial aggression: Land grabbing and direct rule are quintessentially imperialistic. When we look at these numbers, the historical structure surfaces. During the late eighteenth century (during Britain's ascent phase), we see bouts of expansion followed by a relative abatement in the mid-nineteenth century. Then, in the late nineteenth century, during Britain's decline, we see an upswing (Figure 6.1). Admittedly, the first phase of imperialism should be broken up into two peak periods: an upsurge in the 1760s and then a new and longer wave in the 1780s.[3] Yet when taken together, they can be seen as part of a larger single wave of imperialism; larger, that is, relative to the mid-nineteenth century.

We may also visualize the historical dynamics of U.S. imperialism by a similar approach, although we should be sensitive to historical context. Because colonialism had become illegitimate for any world power in the latter half of the twentieth century, we would not expect American imperialism to be measured

[3] These two waves are separated temporally and geographically: The first wave in the 1760s occurred largely in the Americas and the Caribbean (including the annexation of Quebec, Cape Breton, Grenada, St. Vincent, and Tobago), whereas the second wave beginning in the 1780s included not only territories in the Americas, but also new additions farther off in Asia and Africa (e.g., parts of India, New South Wales, Penang, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, and the Cape Colony).

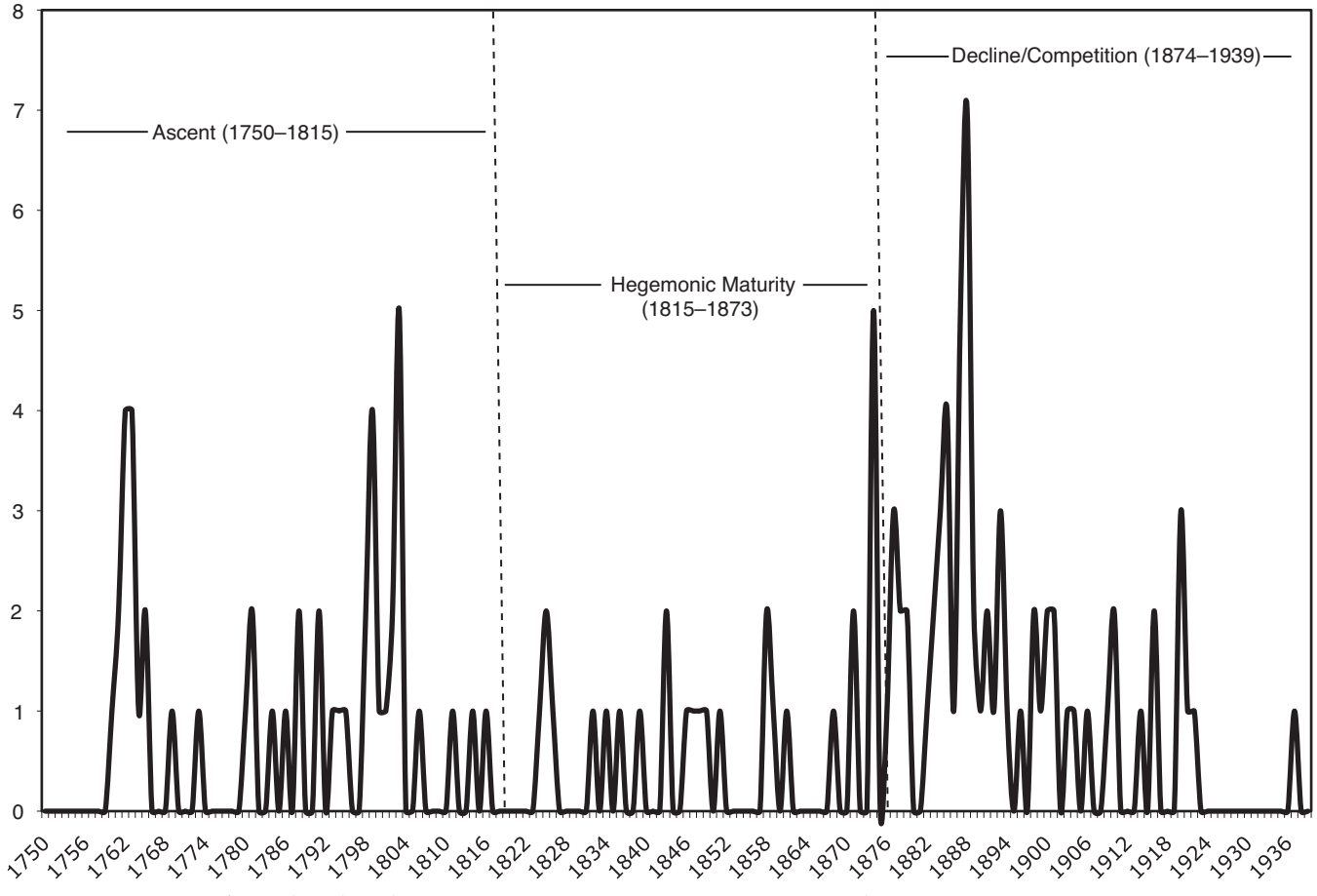

FIGURE 6.1. Waves of British Colonial Annexations, 1750–1939. *Source:* See Appendix: Notes on Data.

solely by direct colonization. Accordingly, if we wish to examine patterns of imperialism over the longer *durée* of the nineteenth century through the early twenty-first century, we should look at colonization and direct military interventions together. Although direct military intervention is not the same as colonization, it is nonetheless more costly and overt than diplomacy, financial aid, or other (perhaps more subtle) mechanisms of influence. Looking at both colonization and military interventions thereby provides a window into the historical ups and downs of U.S. imperial aggression that is more comparable to Britain's ups and downs. Doing so yields a complicated picture, but from it emerges the same sequence of expansion, abatement, and reassertion (Figure 6.2). There are four peak periods or waves of heightened imperialistic aggression (marked by letters A, B, C, D). The highest point is the period around 1898 (wave C). The next major wave occurs in the late twentieth century, beginning circa the 1980s (wave D). In between there is a low trough. The first three waves taken together correspond with America's period of hegemonic ascent. The fourth and most recent wave (wave D) corresponds to America's period of decline. The historical pattern of British imperialism is thus reiterated in American imperialism.

We should be more precise. We have been treating the entire historical period up until hegemonic maturity as part of a single ascent phase, but this is problematic. Surely we cannot consider the entire history of Britain up until 1815 as part of its ascent phase. So when does ascent begin? To address this, we can draw on world-systems theorists and their demarcation of global cycles. In this approach, the period of ascent officially begins when the prior hegemon declines and the global system becomes more competitive. For instance, the proper period of America's ascent would begin in 1874 when the prior hegemon (in this case, Britain) began its fall and the global field became more competitive. For Britain's ascent, the issue is more complicated, but we can take the year 1763 as a starting point. This is the year when Britain proved itself to be a real contender for global power by defeating France in the Seven Years' War.[4] Demarcating the ascent periods in this way does not alter our story: We still see more imperialistic activity in the ascent phase than during the maturity phase. We also see higher average annual rates of activity in these periods of ascent and decline than during the hegemonic maturity phase (see Tables 6.2 and 6.3).

In short, just as all empires surely rise and surely fall, so too have the two hegemonic empires in the modern era – the American and British empires – followed a pattern of extension, stability, and reextension. In the two states' imperial careers there have been moments or periods when they became more directly imperialistic, employing more direct and costly means to exert influence in the world than in other moments or periods. Furthermore, these fluctuations

[4] This periodization comes from Wallerstein, who asserts that in 1763 Britain proves to be a viable global hegemon, but does not consolidate its position until 1815. See Wallerstein (1980), p. 245; Wallerstein (1989), p. 57.

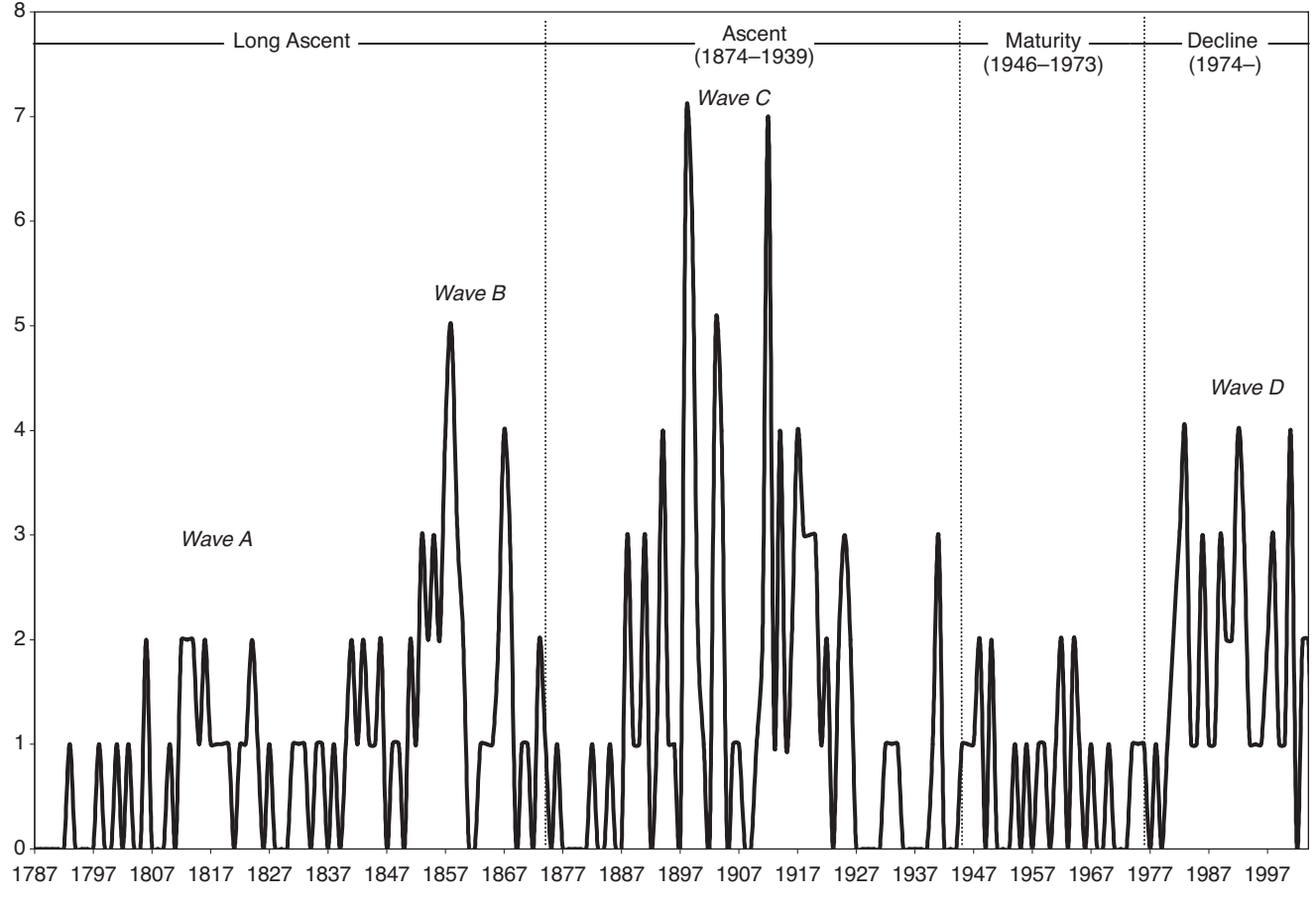

FIGURE 6.2. Waves of U.S. Imperial Aggression, 1787–2004. *Source*: See Appendix: Notes on Data.

TABLE 6.2. *Rate of British Colonial Annexations by Historical Phase*

Number of Years	Phase	Years	Colonies Acquired	Annual Rate
52	Ascent/Competition	1763–1815	39	0.75
57	Maturity	1816–1873	23	0.40
65	Decline/Competition	1874–1939	69	1.06

correlate with the phases of the two states' hegemonic careers. The two states were less aggressive during their respective periods of hegemonic maturity than during their periods of ascent or decline.[5]

Drawing on lessons from earlier chapters, we can see that there are other correlates to these phases. We have seen, for instance, that the phases of imperialism came with certain discursive patterns. During their respective periods of hegemony, talk of "empire" was suppressed or at least lessened in both countries. The banner of empire was lowered only to then be raised again during the decline phase. In fact, in the United States, talk of American empire proliferated during *both* the ascent and decline phases. As the United States constructed its overseas empire in the Caribbean and Pacific, talk of the United States as an empire came to the fore, just as it did during the late twentieth and into the present century as America's "new imperialism" was unleashed amidst America's decline. The structure of imperial discourse over time followed the fluctuations of imperial aggression.

U.S. and British trade policies roughly correspond with the phases of hegemony and imperialism too. During their respective phases of hegemonic maturity, both the U.S. and British imperial states pursued similar economic policies and espoused similar trade rhetoric at the same time that they lessened their direct imperialism. In particular, as seen in Chapter 3, both liberalized their trade policies and made gestures toward global free trade. For the British state, this was reflected in the repeal of the Corn Laws and various tariff reductions through the 1860s. For the American state, it was reflected in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (1947).[6] This is not to say that both states acted as benevolent economic hegemons or that they uniformly pursued so-called free trade in full. Many economic sectors remained under tariff protection, and the free trade rhetoric was often performative, sometimes contradicted by hypocritical policies. It is the case nonetheless that the trade policies of both states were more liberal than during the ascent phase. As hegemons, both states not only

[5] Quantitative studies of the world system have suggested similar dynamics to imperialism, although they examine the dynamics at the level of global system (rates of colonization by all states). See Bergesen and Schoenberg (1980) and Boswell (1989).

[6] These economic parallels, as well as main differences, are covered in O'Brien (2002). On U.S. trade policy, see especially Chorev (2007).

TABLE 6.3. *Rate of U.S. Annexations and Military Interventions by Historical Phase*

Number of Years	Phase	Years	Annexations & Interventions	Annual Rate
65	Ascent/Competition	1874–1939	88	1.35
27	Maturity	1946–1973	18	0.67
30	Decline/Competition	1974–2004	53	1.77

preferred informal empire; they also preferred the open door to mercantilist gates – in rhetoric at least if not in practice.

The pattern thus holds: Both the British and American states extended their direct imperial aggression, retracted or at least stabilized it, and then reextended it during their respective periods of decline. This invites us to wonder whether there is some kind of deeper logic to it all. Is the pattern of imperialism explicable or just accident – a miraculous coincidence? The previous chapter has explained why the British and American states embarked on new imperialisms during their respective phases of hegemonic decline. Yet this only accounts for why the two states reasserted themselves during their decline phases. It does not explain why they both became more aggressive during their ascent phases or why their direct imperialism receded during their periods of hegemony. It is a historically specific explanation of one moment in a larger cycle; it does not illuminate the cycle in its entirety. The question remains: Might there be some kind of logic governing the foregoing fluctuations of imperial aggression?

Explaining the Pattern

Surely any explanation for the American and British cycles of imperialism would have to include a multitude of factors. Reaching across seas and over historical eras, the pattern of imperialism might not reduce to a single explanatory force. If the story were to turn on any single force at all, however, it should have to do with the structure of the global field; or more precisely, *global economic competition*. We would expect this to be important because it is exactly what differentiates the different phases of hegemonic cycles in the first place. The concept of hegemony refers to global economic structures. The idea is that the world system oscillates between phases of hegemonic maturity and competition. The hegemonic maturity phase (or "unicentric" or "unipolar" phase) is when one state enjoys a preponderance over the world economy. The other phase is one of competition (or "multicentricity" or "multipolarity"); this is a time of intense economic rivalry between states.[7] The former is a period when there is a single hegemon; the latter is when that hegemon declines as competition arises. Facing unprecedented rivals that are capturing increasing shares of

[7] Wallerstein (1984), Wallerstein (2002b).

world output, the hegemon no longer enjoys a preponderance over the world economy. The global field shifts from a unipolar or unicentric structure to a multipolar or multicentric structure.

We have just seen that the British and American cycles of imperialism correspond with these phases in the hegemony cycle. The two states turned to more direct modalities of imperialism and heightened their aggression when they faced decline; that is, when the global economic field became more competitive and entered a multicentric phase. The same goes for their periods of ascent. As each state rose to power, the prior hegemon was in decline and the global field became more competitive. In that phase, each imperial state was more prone to step up its imperial aggression. It was only during their respective phases of hegemonic maturity when the states' respective aggression and boldness gave way to indirect modalities of imperial power. Put differently, it was only when the field was less competitive and the system entered an unipolar phase that direct imperialism waned.

The pattern can now be understood in more precise relation to competitive structures of the global field. In brief, when economically dominant in the world economy relative to other states – that is, when the global field was *unicentric* and so competition was low – the British and American states preferred to cultivate clients through subtle mechanisms of power rather than deploying either colonization or overt military force. But when either state was struggling economically against other states in a more competitive global field – that is, when the field was *multicentric* – they were more willing to colonize or use overt military force. In short, competitive structures of the global field appear to breed direct imperial aggression. The question is why.

Competition and Multicentricity

To answer, let us turn first to Britain's waves of imperial aggression. In Chapter 5, we saw something of how competition in the global field during the late nineteenth century pushed the British state to become bolder and more aggressive. Beginning in the 1870s, Britain's economic supremacy was challenged by upstarts and older powers. British firms were threatened by foreign firms while competing states like Germany, the United States, France, Italy, and Russia introduced or reasserted new tariff systems that threatened to cut Britain out. Some of the rivals (not least Germany and the United States) began using their new economic muscles to build their military power. In this highly competitive context, British firms pushed the British state to annex new territory in order to secure routes, markets, and raw materials. The British state often responded affirmatively, operating out of its own concerns. Fearing rivals' military power and the loss of economic access, the British state annexed new territory and initiated military interventions in hopes of regaining some advantage, ensuring economic inputs, and keeping rivals at their heels. In short, although there were other factors involved in Britain's new imperialism – such as the breakdown of clientelism abroad and domestic economic crises – global competition played an important part by making the British state feel more threatened and insecure.

Imperial aggression was a defensive move against an increasingly competitive – that is, multicentric – global environment.

If this is true, then we should expect a similar logic to have produced Britain's earlier wave of direct imperialism in the eighteenth century (from the 1740s to 1815), when Britain was not in decline but struggling to ascend. This period was not different in structure from the later decline period from 1874 to World War I. Like that period, it was a highly competitive phase in the global system. In 1750, the United Kingdom's percentage share of world manufacturing output was 1.9. France's was 4.0, Russia's was 5.0, and Austria-Hungary's was 2.9.[8] The European system, as Paul Kennedy notes, was "one of five Great Powers – France, the Habsburg Empire, Prussia, Britain and Russia – as well as lesser countries like Savoy and declining states like Spain."[9] This economic and attendant political competition was thus expressed overseas. By the mid-1700s, for instance, Britain had already established a string of satellite colonies along the North American coast and in parts of the Caribbean (which were vital to Britain's growing economy); however, Spain and France were poised to halt Britain's advance.[10] France dominated the slave trade, the sugar sector, and the entrepôt trade in Caribbean produce; and both France and Spain were positioned to take over Britain's activities in other sectors.[11] In the Ottoman empire and the Mediterranean, British merchants also faced competition. Anglo-French rivalry in textiles was intense. Finally, Britain's trade with the European Continent faced repeated challenges. The Continent was the dominant destination of British exports until the early 1770s. In 1750, Europe accounted for 71 percent of British exports.[12] But Britain had to jostle against rivals, especially France, to maintain position in the European market.[13]

As with the late nineteenth century, this overarching climate of competition at the close of the eighteenth century created consistent worry and concern among British merchants, producers, and policy makers who fretted about being pushed out completely. Men on the spot, as well as intellectuals in London, watched Spain's activities in the Americas and predicted that Spain was making a comeback from its previous imperial heyday.[14] France was even more of a threat. A common fear was that France would "master the whole continent" in North America; that the French were "artfully working for universal Empire in America."[15] London also worried about French expansion in Europe, which would cut off Britain from a key market.[16] Meanwhile, in Asia, the British envoys in Constantinople repeatedly worried about French

[8] Bairoch (1982), pp. 280–1; Wallerstein (1989), p. 70.
[9] Kennedy (1987), p. 73–4.
[10] Cain and Hopkins (1993), p. 85; Price (1998), p. 89.
[11] Harris (1996), p. 135.
[12] Conway (2005), p. 358; Price (1998) pp. 87, 101.
[13] Black (1986), p. 135.
[14] Paquette (2004).
[15] Harris (1996), pp. 133–4.
[16] Conway (2005), pp. 358–9.

"encroachments on our trade" and that the French would "ruin us" in the East Indies.[17] British political economists framed the competition as a zero-sum game: Britain's rivals had to be out-competed rather than just allowed to coexist. Britain, they declared, must "control a general kind of *lead in commerce* distinct from any of the governments of Europe." Only by gaining a lead would Britain enjoy a vast "commercial dominion" without fear of rivalry.[18]

Given this context, the same processes that led to imperial aggression in the late nineteenth century unfolded during this phase too. First British capitalists and merchants pressured the British state to annex new territories for protection and advantage. Merchants pressed London for colonies so that they could have "safe and unimpeded access to the consumers and sources of supply" all around the world (much in the same way that merchants in the late nineteenth century pressed for African colonies to ward off rival tariff blocs).[19] Various other interest and lobbying groups – ranging from overseas planters to middle-class merchants to financiers – also pushed for expansion on the same ground.[20] The pressure intensified during the formative decades of Britain's industrial transformation (the 1760s and 1770s). As rivals threatened to undo Britain's progress, financial interests and manufacturing groups pressed more firmly for access to inexpensive raw materials and colonial markets.[21]

Second, the British state became increasingly concerned about geopolitical threats: The imperative of securing capital was conjoined with the imperative of containing geopolitical rivals. Economic competition did not only mean that capitalists' interests were impacted; it also had implications for security. In the Indies and the Americas, French merchants could undercut British trade while French colonial holdings could serve as springboards for invading Britain's wealthy settlements or blockading vital trade routes during wartime.[22] Furthermore, Britain's "fiscal-military state" of the time demanded that large portions of public funds go to the military, and public funds – when not borrowed – depended on healthy foreign trade. Taxes from customs revenues were especially important, not only as a new means to acquire money, but as a domestic political strategy to keep a lower tax burden on Britain's landed class (who remained important political actors despite the onset of industrialization).[23] Thus were trade and security intertwined. As one British writer in 1735 summed, "[O]ur trade is the Mother and Nurse of our Seamen; Our Seaman the Life of our Fleet; And our Fleet the Security and Protection of our Trade: And that both together are the WEALTH, STRENGTH, AND

[17] Quoted in Black (1986), pp. 134, 153.
[18] Pownall (1766), pp. 4, 6; see also Koehn (1994), p. 16.
[19] O'Brien (1998), p. 71.
[20] Olson (1992), Wilson (1995).
[21] Koehn (1994), pp. 18–19.
[22] Duffy (1987), p. 19.
[23] Brewer (1989), pp. 202–4; O'Gorman (1997), p. 177; Koehn (1994), p. 20.

GLORY OF GREAT BRITAIN."[24] Another writer asserted in 1765: "A *Nation* cannot be safe without *Power; Power* cannot be obtained without *Riches;* nor *Riches* without Trade."[25]

As with the late nineteenth century, British imperialism in this multicentric phase was a response to heightened competition. Imperial aggression became a way for the British state to fend off both economic and geopolitical threats from rivals amidst its own bid for dominance in the field. It followed that the targets of most of Britain's territorial aggression were in the Americas and the Caribbean; those very sites where Britain had growing economic interests and where rivals were well positioned.[26] Taking territories in these areas was aimed, first, at maintaining the security of Britain's preexisting colonies and trade routes against those rivals. William Pitt explained in 1761 that the key objective in acquiring territory in the New World was the "entire safety" of Britain's North American possessions and especially "the secure possession of that most valuable conquest of Canada."[27] Taking territory was likewise aimed at expanding trade into new areas, which in turn involved ousting or at least containing rival empires. "The growing advantages [of taking additional territory in Canada]," said William Shirley, former governor of Massachusetts, were

> . . . the State of Security, which the Settlers in North America would be put into, by the Removal of the French; The extensive Trade with the Indians, the Increase of the Fishery, the Rich vacant Country for new Settlements, and the quick Growth of their Estates would make the Inhabitants increase if not in a Duplicate proportion to what they have hitherto done, yet in a much greater degree.[28]

The annexation of Florida was motivated similarly. It would remove the threat of Spanish invasion of British North America from the south while also, as Lord Shelburne explained, opening "a new field of commerce" and providing "great additional resources for the increase of our naval power."[29]

Territorial expansion was also aimed at undercutting rivals' trade and economic power, thereby removing the economic and security threat at once. In the 1740s, William Pitt had already laid out the essence of this idea, in regard to Cape Breton: "The possession of this valuable island," he said, "puts it in our power absolutely to ruin the great trade carried on by the French to North America."[30] Later in the century, British statesmen like Secretary of State Henry Dundas argued that taking complete control of the West Indies would be beneficial "both in the view of humbling the power of France, and with the view

[24] Quoted in Baugh (1994), p. 195.
[25] Quoted in Koehn (1994), p. 62.
[26] Ward (1998), p. 415.
[27] Quoted in Hyam and Martin (1975), p. 30. See also Peters (1993), pp. 50–1.
[28] Quoted in Koehn (1994), p. 171.
[29] Quoted in Hyam and Martin (1975), p. 31.
[30] Peters (1993), p. 37.

of enlarging our wealth and security."[31] Proponents of expansion in London in the 1790s asserted:

> France is the only power whose maritime force has hitherto been a balance to that of Great Britain and whose commerce has rivaled ours in the two worlds; whose intrigues have fomented and kept alive the ruinous wars in India. Could England succeed in destroying the naval strength of her rival; could she turn the tide of that rich commerce, which has so often excited her jealousy, in favor of her own country . . . the degree of commercial prosperity . . . would exceed all calculation. It would not be the work of a few years only, but it would require ages for France to recover.[32]

France's Caribbean colonies had accounted for two-fifths of its total trade and two-thirds of its ocean-going shipping tonnage by the late eighteenth century. Taking former French colonies would disrupt this French circuit of economic and naval power while expanding Britain's own.[33] Fittingly, the British state took the French colonies Tobago and St. Lucia because of their strategic position within France's network and the prospect of consolidating Britain's network in turn.[34]

The similarities between Britain's period of ascent (1750s–1815) and its decline (1873–1914) should now be clear, as should the reason for why both were marked by imperial boldness and assertion. Both were periods of multicentrism, which in turn meant a competitive global field. Aggressive imperialism served as a way for the British state to gain or maintain position in that competitive field. During its period of ascent in the late eighteenth century, the British state was a rising contender, and direct imperialism accompanied its bid to hegemony. Territorial expansion and related military might were ways of cultivating strength while beating down rival bidders. By the same token but from the other historical end, the British state employed direct imperialism during its period of decline in the late nineteenth century to meet rising challengers. The very aggression that Britain had previously employed amidst its bid was exhibited by challengers in the late nineteenth century, and the British state responded in kind.

The fact that America's waves of imperial aggression corresponded to multipolar phases in the global field can be explained similarly. As noted, there were three waves of heightened imperialist aggression by the American state during America's long ascendancy from the late eighteenth century to World War II. These are worth elaborating. The earlier two waves followed regional and hemispheric dynamics (waves A and B, Figure 6.2). They were aimed at ousting rival European powers, securing territory and control over the frontier, and ultimately attaining hemispheric dominance. The earliest wave, beginning circa 1810, marked the American state's drive to regional dominance. It involved annexations and interventions to gain control over contiguous territory and to

[31] Duffy (1987), p. 25.
[32] *Times*, Feb. 8, 1793, p. 3. See also ibid., p. 24.
[33] Duffy (1998), p. 187.
[34] Fieldhouse (1982), p. 76.

TABLE 6.4. *U.S. Waves of Military Intervention or Annexation by Region, 1810–1870*

Region	1810–1825	1840–1870
Africa	1	3
Asia-Pacific	0	22
Caribbean, Central & South America	7	14
Europe & E. Europe	1	1
Middle East and N. Africa	1	2
N. American Continent & Mexico	9	10

Source: See Appendix: Notes on Data.

fend off threats from rival European powers. The War of 1812 with Britain was part of this wave. Other interventions included the occupation of the Oregon territory and engagements in Spanish Florida. Fittingly, near the end of this wave, President Monroe gave his 1823 annual message later known as the Monroe Doctrine. Monroe bragged that over the previous decades the United States had acquired vast new territories and had ended interference by Britain, France, Russia, and Spain. He concluded: "[T]he American continents . . . are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers."[35] This wave was likewise aimed at securing mercantile power against rivals. Merchants had seen threats to their activities beginning in 1808, and trade with Latin America and Caribbean countries offered some hope, as long as the Spanish and British could be kept out and "freebooters" contained.[36] Accordingly, although some deployments in this period took place as far away as Tripoli, Tunis, and Algiers, most took place in the Caribbean (Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Santo Domingo) and involved troop landings to chase down or suppress freebooters, pirates, or "marauders."[37]

The second wave of aggression occurred in the years from 1840 to 1870. Whereas the previous wave marks America's rise to regional dominance, this wave represents America's consolidation of hemispheric dominance. Fewer instances of military force or territorial annexation involved activities in or around contiguous territory on the continent (Table 6.4). The other instances occurred outside the continent but within the hemisphere. For example, interventions in the Caribbean and Latin America doubled in number from the first wave. This suggests that the United States, having secured mercantile control, sought to expand it westward, looking for profitable passageways to the Pacific through Nicaragua and Panama. The Gadsen Purchase from Mexico was part of this endeavor, and American forces were deployed in Nicaragua at least twice. Merchants also intensified their interest in places like Cuba and Santo

[35] Crapol (1979), p. 414.
[36] LaFeber (1989), p. 81.
[37] United States Congress Committee on Foreign Affairs (1970), pp. 50–3.

Domingo, leading to various instances of force in those areas.[38] The United States also looked to the Asia-Pacific area as never before. The majority of instances in this second wave took place there, whereas none had taken place during the first wave (see Table 6.4).[39]

As opposed to the first two waves, the third wave from the 1880s to 1914 (wave C, Figure 6.2) was much higher in frequency and intensity. It propelled the American state onto the global stage. This was the period of America's ascent that coincided with heightened *global* competition. At the system level, it was a multicentric phase, occurring at the same time as Britain's decline from hegemonic status. For Britain, multicentricity meant the appearance of formidable rivals like Germany and the United States, poised as pretenders to power. But for rivals like the United States, it meant facing a declining hegemon threatening to reassert itself. It also involved potential confrontations with a range of other pretenders to power. The famous American thinker Brooks Adams, in his prescient book *America's Economic Supremacy* (1900), captured the scene. There was a "new struggle for life among nations," he wrote. It involved the relative decline of Britain (and older powers like Spain) and the emergence of Russia, Japan, France, and the United States as rising powers. Adams rightfully concluded that this period of heightened competition was "one of those memorable revolutions wherein civilizations pass from an old to a new condition of equilibrium." He also noted that the period was strikingly similar to the previous period of multicentricity in the late eighteenth century when Britain was on the rise (1760 to 1815). The "last such revolution ended with Waterloo," Adams wrote, and "the one now at hand promises to be equally momentous."[40]

Just as competition in the global field had fueled Britain's bout of imperial aggression in the late eighteenth century, so did it fuel the American states' imperial aggression in this period. As revisionist historians have long shown, American imperialism at this time was driven by multiple pressures felt in the metropole: new racial ideologies and Social Darwinian discourses, the economic crisis of 1893 and the related search for new markets and materials, and an increasingly capable American state poised for global greatness after emerging from the Civil War as a unified, powerful nation.[41] No doubt, these factors are critical for understanding this wave of imperialism. Domestic economic concerns associated with the 1893 depression would stand as particularly noteworthy. In fact, the Hobson-Lenin thesis that imperialism results from capitalists' fear of overproduction at home and the need for new markets

[38] By 1855, in fact, "America's commerce with Cuba had doubled during the previous decade, becoming seven times greater than Great Britain's and even four times larger than Spain's – which owned Cuba" (LaFeber 1989: 135).

[39] Graebner (1983).

[40] Adams (1947 [1900]), p. 63.

[41] This literature is large, but on shifts in the American states' capabilities, see Zakaria (1998); on racial ideology, see the classic work by Hunt (1987) and the recent work by Kramer (2006); on economic factors, see LaFeber (1963).

originated in American business and policy-making circles. Before Hobson and Lenin drafted their theories, American producers, led by the National Association of Manufacturers, and economists like Charles Conant argued that America's productive forces were overflowing and the domestic market could not keep up.[42] They urged the American state to help secure global markets to resolve the problem. The famed "China market" was one of the promised outlets.[43]

Still, the global climate of competition was also an important factor in driving America's imperialism. After all, domestic concerns may have made capitalists in the National Association of Manufacturers or other business groups pressure the American state to become interventionist overseas, but this in itself would not guarantee an agreeable response on the part of the American state. For imperialism to happen, the American state had to have interests in it too. It did. This is because the new economic competition also meant geopolitical competition.

For example, American policy makers and statesmen feared that upstarts like Germany would thwart America's hemispheric domination by making moves on Latin America or the Caribbean. President Roosevelt spoke of how the kaiser might "seize some Venezuelan harbor and turn it into a strongly fortified place of arms . . . with a view to exercising some measure of control over the future of the Isthmian Canal, and over South American affairs generally."[44] He and other statesmen at the time also worried about British or French encroachment. During the 1895 Venezuelan boundary dispute with Britain, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts connected the issue to a wider context of threat. He argued that if the British were allowed to gain more territory in the Americas, France and Germany would do the same, and so the United States should take action lest "South America pass gradually into the hands of Great Britain and other European powers."[45]

America's subsequent involvement with Cuba and Puerto Rico in this period partly followed from these concerns about the European threat. Control over the Caribbean islands was seen as vital for controlling entry to the region and for securing the route to the Panama Canal, which was also seized by the United States at this time. The American state's numerous troop deployments and military occupations of Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti were similarly preemptive. Military power was meant to deal with internal disorder – this was important for American investment – but it was also meant to prevent rival European powers from stepping in. Unchecked domestic instability would

[42] Conant (1898).

[43] The classic work on this thesis is McCormick (1967). A more recent view of American expansion that sees Asia-Pacific more broadly as vital for U.S. interests is Cumings (2009). The argument that the United States expanded abroad to meet domestic economic demands is a common one among the revisionist historians: See, for instance, Williams (1972), LaFeber (1963), and Williams (1969), pp. 408–53 especially.

[44] As Quoted in Fry (1996a), p. 4.

[45] Lodge quoted in Healy (1970), p. 26.

give rival powers an excuse to bring their own military power and hence gain a foothold at the expense of U.S. interests.[46]

America's aggression in the Pacific was due to the same competitive structure. The United States seized islands in the Pacific as stepping stones toward the famed China market; that expansion was necessary to preempt control over China and Asia-Pacific trade by other powers. In part, this necessitated building up America's naval capacities in the region. Alfred Mahan, the naval strategist whose writings were widely influential on statesmen, was clear on this point. He pinned the need for territory in the Pacific on the need for a powerful navy, which was in turn necessary due to heightened international competition:

> The general strenuous impulse of the great civilized states of the world to find and to establish markets and commercial relations outside their own borders and their own people, has led to multifold annexations, and to commercial and naval aggressions. In these the United States has had no part, but they have constituted a political situation that immensely increases her political and commercial anxieties and consequently her naval responsibilities.

Mahan especially worried that other nations were expanding economically to seek privileged markets and control: "[T]here is . . . the effort to extend and sustain commercial advantage by the extension of political power, either by controlling influence or by actual annexation, under cover of either of which the commercial system of the particular country obtains favored conditions, injurious to others, from special privilege all the way up to a practically exclusive market."[47] The only way to stop this was to expand militarily. That, in turn, entailed imperial expansion.

Mahan's views were representative and influential. In 1898, Charles Denby, U.S. minister to China, conveyed the same fear of competition. His worrisome observations are worth quoting at length, for they are indicative of the tenor of the times:

> The eyes of Europe are turned toward China and the European powers are arranging far-reaching plans dictated by territorial ambition. . . . France is annexing territory on her Tonquin frontier, and is building railroads into Yunnan. Russia has laid her hand on Manchuria, and six hundred miles of Russian railroad in Chinese territory will shortly connect the trans-Siberian system with the port of Viadivostock on the Pacific. Germany is obtaining concessions. . . . Japan . . . is daily adding to her military and naval strength, preparing to take her part in the coming struggle for supremacy on the mainland. England has opened new territories for her commerce by asserting the right of British merchants to navigate the West River, the key to the southwest of China. British trade was never so flourishing in China as to-day and the supremacy of England's naval power in Asiatic waters sears testimony to her intention to defend it. All these powers recognize the fact that trade follows the flag. Where their ships go and where they make their national influence felt, there trade springs up to meet them. They recognize

[46] On this as a motivating factor, see Fry (1996a). For more on these interventions in the Caribbean and others in Central America, see Healy (1988), Perkins (1981), and Schoonover (1991).

[47] Mahan (1902), pp. 49–50.

that the present is a critical period in the history of China; that when the breaking up and the inevitable partition come, those who have established themselves will obtain recognition of their interests, those who have failed to do so must see their trade go to the masters of the soil. . . . The people of the United States must not be content to see their neighbors to the West, with their boundless potentialities of trade, handed over, an uncontested prize, to the ambitions of Europe.[48]

These concerns over European competition in the Asia-Pacific region had already led to America's interest in Hawaii and Samoa. "Hawaii holds in the western sea much the same position as Cuba in the Atlantic," wrote Secretary of State James Blaine in 1881. "It is the key to the maritime dominion of the Pacific States . . . under no circumstances can the United States permit any change in the territorial control of either which would cut it adrift from the American system, whereto they both belong."[49] Most in Washington agreed, which is why both areas were seized. "We need Hawaii just as much and a good deal more than we did California," asserted President McKinley in early 1898.[50] Henry C. Ide pressed for the acquisition of Samoa and Hawaii in 1897 on the grounds that "European nations have been swift to seize upon the vantage points" in the region, and so the United States must swiftly do the same.[51]

America's wave of imperial aggression was thus directed toward the "Open Door": The door not only had to be thrust open through force, but kept open as rivals tried to close it.[52] The wider competitive environment made the threat of closure all the more frightful. The interest of the McKinley administration in the Philippines was partially dictated by this fear. McKinley worried that "our commercial rivals in the Orient," such as France and Germany, might annex the Philippine archipelago if the United States did not.[53] These fears were not allayed by the appearance of a German squadron in Manila Bay in early 1898; nor by rumors circulating in the State Department that Germany was hoping to annex the Philippines for itself. Taking the Philippines, Roosevelt argued, would preempt any such attempts.[54]

Other factors propelling America's imperial expansion in the late nineteenth century have been discussed in the scholarly literature. Here the point is to highlight the similarities between U.S. direct imperialism in the late nineteenth century with the late twentieth century and also the similarities between Britain's two phases of imperial expansion. On the one hand, each of these phases

[48] Denby (1898).

[49] Snow (1894), p. 372; also discussed in Zakaria (1998), pp. 141–2.

[50] Quoted in Zimmerman (2002), p. 291. For more on the motive behind the acquisition of Hawaii, see Pratt (1936). See also Healy (1970), p. 25.

[51] Ide (1897), p. 161.

[52] On the historiography relating to the Open Door, see Fry (1996b).

[53] Quoted in Fry (1996a), p. 8.

[54] Bailey (1939); see also Healy (1970), pp. 65–6. For a review of other factors shaping McKinley's decision, see Smith (1993). A similar concern over rivals guided the deployment of American troops in China during the Boxer Rebellion. See Fry (1996a), pp. 9–11.

of imperial aggression involved distinct casual factors: In the late nineteenth century, for instance, ideologies of racial inferiority likely helped propel colonization by the United States, whereas in the late twentieth century, U.S. imperial aggression was partly due to the breakdown in clientelist networks (as seen in the previous chapter). On the other hand, what all of these different bouts of imperial aggression share is that they occurred in the systemic state of multicentricity, those periods when one hegemon is in decline and rivals are ascending. From our foregoing examination, we can now see that this multicentric structure of the global field matters, because *multicentric phases mean heightened economic competition*. Such competition puts states at perilous risk. For hegemons, there is the prospect of ultimate decline, as rising contenders nip at their heels and steadily grow in strength. For the rising contenders, there is the prospect that their ascent will be thwarted by their peers, as everyone makes their bids for power. Thus, for both the declining hegemon and the rising contenders, direct imperial aggression becomes the tactic of choice; a means of warding off rivals, tempering the challenge from competitors if not undercutting them, and securing position in the field. In this way, global competitive fields breed imperial aggression.

But what about periods of hegemony, when competition is lessened?

Hegemony and Abatement

Periods of hegemony entail a different global structure than multicentric periods. In hegemonic periods, a rising state emerges typically from the ashes of a world war to maintain a preponderance over the world economy. The global field becomes unipolar: One state commands global economic flows more than any single competitor. We have seen the correlates of this scenario: Both the British and American states during their respective periods of hegemony lessened their direct aggression. Although still imperialistic, they nonetheless tempered their boldness and entered a phase of imperial abatement. They initiated fewer military interventions and slowed their rate of territorial expansion, instead preferring clientelism, financial entanglements, and covert operations. So what is it about hegemonic states that make them less interested in direct imperialism?

The beginnings of an answer can be found if we reconsider Britain's trade policies. The British state took steps to liberalize global trade amid its period of hegemony. Despite the protectionist Corn Law of 1815, the British state nonetheless enacted the Reciprocity of Duties Act (1823) that promoted reciprocal agreements with foreign governments to free up trade. Progress was slow, but these steps demonstrated Britain's willingness to reduce mercantilist restrictions if not eventually abandon them altogether.[55] In the end many restrictions were lifted, as Britain entered into various treaties that reduced discriminatory tariffs and repealed the Corn Laws in 1846. Thus, Britain showed a stronger

[55] Irwin (1993); O'Brien and Pigman (1992), p. 94.

desire to end mercantilism during its period of hegemony than during the late eighteenth century. The reason why is informative: British firms and the British state were confident that open markets would be to their benefit. Of course, Britain's industrialization and population growth compelled industry to seek more markets and raw materials, and this was one reason behind liberalization. However, the related push came from British industry's belief that markets and materials would be more easily obtained through liberalization rather than restricted mercantilist markets attendant with colonialism. That belief was premised on the assumption that British capital would benefit most from any such liberalization.[56] Provide an open playing field, and British firms will fare best. Obviously, this was a very different view than those espoused in the eighteenth century, when mercantilism ruled. Mercantilism assumed that tariffs were the best way to serve the interests of capital. But the new view of liberalization was different: It marked a new confidence.

As scholars have argued, the new view and self-confidence became dominant during Britain's period of hegemony because of that hegemony precisely. The self-confidence driving liberalization first emerged among British industrialists and traders who saw monumental success during the Napoleonic Wars. It continued to spread as more and more firms saw increasing successes and looked to fields abroad.[57] British officials and policy makers came around to the notion at the same time.[58] Together they liked liberalization because they knew Britain enjoyed comparative advantage. Dominant already in the economic field, and enjoying the most capital, machinery, and high relative productivity, British firms would out-compete anyone given a level playing field and thus reap the most rewards from an open trading economy.[59] If anything, tariffs would hurt British capital: It would encourage other nations to maintain tariffs, thereby shutting British capital out.

Anticolonialism followed partly from this view. If colonialism meant mercantilism, and if mercantilism hurt rather than helped British capital, it would be better not to bother with the expense of territorial rule. The reality at the time must have given sustenance to this view, for British trade in these years saw as much economic fruit outside of the British empire as within it. By the 1850s, exports to the British formal empire constituted only about 30 percent: The rest went to nominally independent nations, especially the United States,

[56] "Britain found no need to strive for preferential access in foreign markets, remaining confident that its comparative advantage in manufactured goods would ensure the success of exporters, provided only that non-discriminatory treatment of its goods abroad was assured." Irwin (1993), p. 94.

[57] See, on the immediate post-1815 period, Hilton (1977). See also the excellent overview in Cain (1999), pp. 38–9.

[58] Platt (1968a), p. 362.

[59] This is an argument made by proponents of the "hegemonic stability" thesis, among many others. See especially Gilpin (1978) and Krasner (1976). Gilpin argues that the strongest countries reap the most benefits from liberalization (see for example Gilpin [1975], p. 84).

Europe, and Latin America.[60] In 1860, only one-fifth of imports came from within the empire.[61] Although trade within the empire was still important, policy makers and businesses alike began to see that trade could flourish even without colonies. Trade needed to expand, but, as the historian Kitson Clark put it long ago, the expansion was not to occur through "force of arms, or the extension of territorial sovereignty," but rather through "the much more subtle weapon of cheapness, the cheapness of the goods produced in Great Britain, a weapon which did not need the might of empire to back it up."[62]

Britain's imperial abatement in the nineteenth century can now be apprehended. Compared to the previous period of ascent or the later period of decline, the threats to British economic power were minimal. Therefore, there was less of a need to seek privileged access to markets or materials through direct imperialism or to spend resources trying to undercut rivals. All that was needed was the open market. This is likely why the British state, by its trade agreements with other states, reduced tariffs even for its colonies: It no longer saw the need for a colonial empire covered under a mercantilist umbrella. Colonies might still be useful, not least for military bases; but they were no longer the only route to economic prosperity. Lord Macauley argued against taking over all of India in 1833 on these grounds exactly. "The mere extent of empire is not necessarily an advantage. . . . It would be . . . far better for us that the people of India . . . were ruled by their own kings, but wearing our broadcloth, and working with our cutlery, than . . . performing their salaams to English collectors and English magistrates."[63] Hegemony meant comparative advantage. Comparative advantage meant a preference for markets over force and money over territory.

This notion of comparative advantage was articulated by various government offices in London when deciding against new annexations. For example, the British state repeatedly declined opportunities to take Sarawak in the 1850s and 1860s. Although some British firms near Sarawak supported annexation, arguing that it was necessary to fend off the nearby Dutch, British officials in London were not worried. Lord Carnavaron explained that the Dutch need not be feared, because "our freer system of trade might give us some advantages over the Dutch."[64] The Foreign Office concurred, adding that "the Dutch are and must remain too weak to cause us any alarm."[65] Similarly, although British trade with the Niger Delta slowly grew in importance through the 1840s to the 1860s, the British state appointed a consul to the region rather than colonize it. The reason was simply that there was no other European presence in the region, and British trade need not worry about competition.[66] Another example is Fiji.

[60] Cain (1999), p. 35.
[61] O'Brien (1988a), p. 167.
[62] Kitson Clark (1967), p. 78. See also Cain (1999), p. 39.
[63] Quoted in Dilke (1890), pp. vii–viii.
[64] Carnavaron, Jan. 25, 1859, FO 12/35.
[65] Wodehouse, August 18, 1860, FO 12/28.
[66] Chamberlain (1988), p. 125.

When the Colonial Office in London was offered by Fijian chiefs to annex Fiji, it turned the offer down, despite rumors that the French might take it instead. Part of the reason was fear of settler–native conflicts (as discussed in Chapter 4), but another was Britain's comparative advantage. Even if France took Fiji, France would not pose an economic threat, but rather a possible boon: Given Britain's position in the region, the French would be forced to import from British sources. "Should she [France] seize the Islands, England would have little cause of inquietude; as in forming her Establishments France would import largely from the English colonies."[67]

None of this is to say that the British state failed to initiate direct imperialism entirely. We have seen in previous chapters that the British state took colonies like Hong Kong and added territory to its domains in India. Yet these acquisitions were fewer in number relative to Britain's previous ascent phase or its later decline phase (both phases of multicentrism). They are exceptions that prove the rule. And their acquisition was not governed by the same forces that propelled expansion in multicentric periods. They were not about obtaining privileged access or undercutting rivals amidst the threat of competition. Hong Kong, Singapore, and the Falkland Islands were taken as trading ports or naval stations so that Britain could enhance existing trade or expand into new areas on which Britain had commercial rather than territorial designs (e.g., China and Latin America). As ports rather than massive territories of land, these were small acquisitions that made larger acquisitions unnecessary. Other acquisitions were governed by a settler-frontier logic. Most of the territories annexed in this time were contiguous with or adjacent to preexisting British settlements, for instance, on the coast of Africa, around India, in Canada, and/or in Australia. These were typically taken at the behest of settlers to protect the integrity of preexisting boundaries against local populations.[68] To be sure, except for areas like India, rival powers were few and far between. As Kennedy puts it, "between 1815 and 1880 much of the British Empire existed in a power-political vacuum. . . . [I]n many parts of the tropics, and for long periods of time, British interests (traders, planters, explorers, missionaries) encountered no foreigners other than the indigenous peoples."[69]

In the absence of competition from serious challengers, the principle of restraint was at work. With economic dominance in the global field and the attendant lack of competition, new territory was not necessary. If anything, colonial expansion or other forms of direct imperialism would upset the status quo from which Britain so benefited. It might incite the anger of other states, delegitimate British hegemony, and invite others to make their own bids. "We have possession," wrote Wellington in 1829, "of nearly every valuable port and colony in the world, and I confess that I am anxious to avoid exciting

[67] Smythe Report, 1 May, 1861, CO 83/1.

[68] Darwin (1997), p. 630; Robinson and Gallagher (1961), p. 8. For more on the frontier logic, see Galbraith (1960), McIntyre (1967).

[69] Kennedy (1987), p. 155

the attention and jealousy of other powers by extending our possessions, and setting the example of gratification of a desire to seize more territories."[70] Restraining from territorial aggrandizement was partly performative, aimed at ensuring the existing geopolitical structure and hence the British position in it. In 1857, Lord Palmerston advised against annexing Egypt on these grounds precisely. In his letter to Lord Clarendon, he admitted that "many parts of the world would be better governed by England." However, because Britain's position depended on "the maintenance of the existing balance of power," Britain should be careful not to become "unprovoked aggressors" overseas or acquire African territory: "[L]et us try to improve all those countries by the general influence of our commerce, but let us abstain from a crusade of conquest which would call down upon us the condemnation of all other civilized nations."[71] The same principle animated Secretary of State Aberdeen's position on California in 1841. Sir Thomas Pakenham, minister to Mexico, at that time conveyed an interest in setting up a British colony in California (then part of Mexico). Aberdeen replied that he was "not anxious for the formation of new and distant Colonies, all of which involve heavy direct and still heavier indirect expenditure, besides multiplying the liabilities of misunderstanding and collisions with Foreign Powers.'"[72] In short, rather than upset the system from which they and capitalists benefited, state managers preferred to keep things intact by not seizing new swaths of territory. As long as the British state was on top of the hierarchy with little threat from below, it had an interest in stability and order.

This interest meant not only restraining from territorial aggrandizement; it also meant diplomacy with other states rather than military force. Too much aggression would incite other powers and threaten to overthrow stable relations. This was the approach taken by British officials during the Congress of Vienna at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Having emerged victorious and comparably unscathed, Britain negotiated a postwar settlement that was aimed at preventing disruptive wars and maintaining a balance of power on the European Continent. Because Britain was the most powerful economically, it stood to gain from this arrangement: If other states agreed to the settlement, direct military intervention and costly war would be unnecessary.[73] The strategy involved buying allies. Britain used subsidies and loans to states like Prussia, Austria, and Sweden – as well as arms and contributions to Spain, Portugal, and Sicily – to help win the war and render them dependent on British good will. The subsidies were known as "Pitt's gold."[74] Yet this form of making alliance was precarious, not to mention expensive. So the British state also

[70] Anderson (1986), p. 256.
[71] Palmerston to Clarendon, March 1, 1857, reproduced in Bourne (1970), pp. 333–4.
[72] Aberdeen to Pakenham, December 15, 1841, quoted in Adams (1909), p. 747.
[73] On this strategy and the postwar settlement see Chamberlain (1988), Schroeder (1992), Hobson (2002), pp. 312–14, and Mann (1993), pp. 282–8.
[74] Ikenberry (2001a), pp. 94–5.

strove for cultural hegemony. In the words of G. John Ikenberry, it exercised "strategic restraint" to maintain the status quo.[75] Britain strove to legitimate its dominance and maintain a balance of power on the European Continent by showing that it would use excessive force. This would limit the possibility of future rivalry and hence limit future threats to British hegemony.

Strategic restraint at the Congress of Vienna translated into performative anticolonialism. To show its moderation, Britain deliberately opted against acquiring the former Dutch colonies at the Congress. "I am sure our reputation on the Continent as a feature of our strength, power and confidence," declared Castlereagh, "is of more real value to us than any acquisition thus made."[76] British officials also stood back as various crises broke out across the European Continent, trying not to meddle directly and thereby upset the equilibrium from which Britain so clearly benefited. This "minimalist participation," notes Patrick Karl O'Brien, was meant "to avoid enmity towards the Empire and envy at Britain's huge stake in overseas trade, shipping, and investment." In fact, over the entire period, the only time when British troops again operated on the European Continent was during the Crimean War of 1854–1856. This stands as the exception; for the most part, British power was aimed at "co-opting" other states "into a system for the orderly and predictable conduct of international relations, especially commerce, that could remain efficient for the security of the empire and for the preservation of the dominant role that the British economy had attained in world trade and in servicing the global economy."[77]

Britain's imperial abatement was thus driven by its place within the overarching global field and by that field's very structure. Because Britain was hegemonic, and by the same token because the global field was unipolar with minimal competition, the British state tended toward restraint. Its comparative advantage in the economic field meant that serious competition was absent, and direct imperialism was not necessary for undercutting rivals or gaining privilege. Moreover, Britain's position in the field meant that it had an interest in maintaining the status quo, which in turn meant influencing other states through hidden and subtle exercises of power rather than bold, direct, and provocative imperialism that might mobilize opposition. We now know that it was only when Britain's share of trade was later threatened that this strategy shifted and military aggression or direct rule became more necessary. But generally for the nineteenth century, the British state followed the principle of informal rule when possible and formal rule when necessary (to paraphrase a

[75] Ibid., p. 90.

[76] Nicolson ([1946] 2001), p. 99; see also Ikenberry (2001a), p. 98, fn. 50.

[77] O'Brien (2002), p. 11. It is the case, as seen in a previous chapter, that the English state summoned its military might to attack China and threaten South America. But as Kitson Clark notes, in general "these occasions were only the contingent consequences of the movement caused by the ebullient power of a world-wide commerce, which normally did not need the power of empire to secure its entry." See Kitson Clark (1967), p. 78. See also for this point Fieldhouse (1973), p. 94.

famous phrase from Robinson and Gallagher). It only became more necessary during the multicentric phase of intense competition and British decline.[78]

Was America's imperial abatement during its hegemonic phase in the mid-twentieth century governed by the same logic? From a previous chapter, we have already seen that the United States did not seize colonies during its period of hegemonic maturity. Besides turning the former Japanese mandated islands into "strategic trust" territory in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, it tempered its territorial ambition and preferred informal mechanisms of imperial power. We have also seen that part of the reason for this was the global spread of anticolonial nationalism. Anticolonial nationalism made the costs of recolonization far too high. Still, territorial annexation is not the only expression of direct imperialistic aggression. Besides annexation, the United States might have initiated temporary military occupations or military assaults such as those that proliferated later in the century during America's period of decline. So why were there fewer of those types of actions during the period of U.S. hegemonic maturity?

Part of the answer lies in the rivalry between the United States and USSR during the Cold War. Too much military aggression would anger the Soviets and spark a global confrontation that, given the development of nuclear technology, would be disastrous to everyone. The fear of provoking the Soviets was important to key policy makers of the period, such as Dean Acheson in the State Department, who preferred covert operations for precisely this reason. Covert operations, such as the clandestine activities by the CIA against Communists in Greece in 1947, were meant to fight against Soviet influence without being blatantly aggressive and confrontational.[79] Similarly, President Dwight Eisenhower was reluctant to intervene in Hungary in 1956, despite his talk of "liberating" Eastern Europe from the USSR, because of this same fear of provoking the Soviets.[80]

Yet in itself, the desire to avoid direct confrontation with the USSR does not explain abatement. The 1945 Yalta agreements with Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt had specified different spheres of influence: The USSR would have one-third of the globe (much of east of the Oder-Nesse Line in Europe across through China), whereas the United States and its allies would de facto control the rest. This means that the United States could have heightened its imperialistic activity in its own spheres of influence – such as its own hemisphere – with less risk of a hot war. And we know that the American state did indeed heighten its military activity in Central America despite the Cold War: In the 1980s, during America's period of economic decline, the United States invaded Panama and Grenada. So why, during America's period of hegemony were there not more Panamas and Grenadas? Why the relative decrease in imperial aggression?

[78] Robinson and Gallagher (1953).
[79] Isenberg (1989).
[80] Kovrig (1973).

As was the case with Britain in the nineteenth century, part of the answer lies in America's structural position as hegemon and, therefore, America's comparative advantage. From 1948 onward, the United States accounted for a larger proportion of international trade than any other country.[81] Of the world's fifty largest corporations in 1956, forty-two were American.[82] In 1950, no country in the world had a GNP totaling even one-third that of America's.[83] Economically dominant, the United States had fewer economic rivals than in other periods, and American firms as well as the American state fretted less about obtaining privileged access to other countries or regions than they did earlier in the century. As long as doors were kept open through treaties or subsidies, they need not have been forced open by military power.

Due to America's relative economic power after the war, this is exactly what happened. We have already seen that the United States used its economic power after the Second World War to compel the European empires to open their colonies up to American trade. Here it should also be noted that the United States used its economic might to compel Europe itself to be opened up. By conditions attached to various loans and subsidies from 1945 onward, the United States was able to make the dollar supreme and increase trade with Europe.[84] Given the power of its dollar, the American state did not have to employ direct imperialism to open up the world to its economic interests. It could buy it. This repeated what Britain had tried to do during and after the Napoleonic Wars.[85] It is the hegemon's privilege to use money so that direct imperialism would be less necessary. Pitt's gold is the hegemon's gold.

America's economic hegemony also meant that officials and policy makers in Washington had a stronger interest in maintaining rather than altering the status quo from which the United States so benefited. The global order had to be kept intact rather than transformed, if only because U.S. hegemony relied on it. This is how the Cold War fits into the story. The containment policy – first advocated by Dean Acheson to help justify the Korean War and then embedded in the famous National Security Council document 68 (NSC-68) of 1950 – was to let the USSR coexist with the United States because this was deemed the best way to ensure stability.[86] The Yalta agreement of 1945 had expressed the basic

[81] Webb and Krasner (1989), pp. 188–9.
[82] Bergesen and Sahoo (1985), pp. 596–7.
[83] Lundestad (1986), p. 264.
[84] The United States encouraged a regional European bloc in the interests of promoting its internal development, which in turn helped increase trade, even as the actual stipulations in the loans did not dismantle tariff barriers against the United States. See Lundestad, 1986 #2468}, pp. 268–9; Gilpin (1971), pp. 411–12; Stein (1984), pp. 377–9.
[85] Ikenberry (2001a), pp. 94–5.
[86] On Acheson and containment compared with other possible routes at the time, see Cumings (1990), II, pp. 3–78 and Messer (1977). For more on the containment strategy and global order, see the seminal works by Gaddis (1982) and Leffler (1992). Gaddis and Leffler differ in their opinions on America's global ambitions: Leffler suggests that America's Cold War containment strategy was essentially about overthrowing the Soviet Union in the end, whereas Gaddis is closer to the view that containment was more about maintaining a bipolar political order.

idea. By Yalta, the Soviets were unofficially granted jurisdiction over the areas essentially occupied by the Red Army already, and the United States was given the rest. This was simply "an agreement on the status quo," as Wallerstein puts it.[87] The agreement had the effect of global stabilization. As both the United States and USSR more or less kept their end of the bargain, overt military aggression would not be necessary for security.[88]

In short, America's hegemonic position gave the American state an interest in the existing geopolitical structure. The status quo was vital for America's own vitality. This was not just a matter of maintaining the peace; it was a matter of maintaining the existing structure of the global hierarchy so that the United States remained at the apex. If the order from which the American economy benefited was unraveled, so might America's economic hegemony. George Kennan neatly summed up the imperative in a foreign policy review by the State Department in 1948: "We have about 50% of the world's wealth but only 6.3% of its population. This disparity is particularly great as between ourselves and the peoples of Asia. In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity without positive detriment to our national security."[89]

One result of this search for stability was containment. Another was the Atlantic Charter and then, ultimately, the United Nations. The final and more important result for our purposes was strategic restraint. As for Britain after 1815, so too for the United States: Strategic restraint meant displays of moderation in order to gain the acquiescence of other states. In the case of the United States, strategic restraint was partly directed at the colonial and postcolonial world. Already we have seen that American policy makers were concerned about their prestige in the eyes of the colonial world and the newly independent countries. This concern militated against any American-led recolonization of postcolonial areas. However, the concern over maintaining prestige also prevented the United States from engaging in excessive militaristic aggression. This is why covert action was preferable to overt action: Not only would overt action anger the Soviets, it would incite third-world nationalists and put the global political equilibrium from which the United States benefited at risk.[90]

[87] Wallerstein (2002a), p. 62.

[88] The times when it became more necessary were when the ambiguities in the Yalta agreements became manifest, such as during the Korean crisis that led to the Korean War. But this, along with Vietnam, was the exception that proved the rule. To be sure, even those instances when the United States and USSR were unclear on their boundaries – such as the Greek civil war (1946–1949), the Hungarian crisis (1956), the question of Eastern Europe as a whole from 1945–1947 – there was no full-scale conflict. American military power was not used to resolve it. Generally, Yalta worked. See Wallerstein (2006), p. 79.

[89] "Memorandum by the Director of the Policy Planning Staff [Kennan] to the Secretary of State and Under Secretary of State [Lowell]," February 24, 1948, FRUS 1948, I., p. 524; see also Ikenberry (2001a), p. 169.

[90] Rudgers (2000).

The concern over prestige and global stability also explains why the Eisenhower administration was so incensed over the French, British, and Israeli invasion of the Suez Canal in 1956. This is an instance where U.S. interests were threatened and direct imperial aggression could have been used – but was not. The reason why it was not cuts to the heart of our story.

Successive American administrations had not been happy with Egyptian President Gamal Nasser. His decision to nationalize the Suez Canal was a direct challenge to America's influence in the region. But Eisenhower did not command U.S. forces to join the French-British-Israeli invasion. To the contrary, he pulled the invasion back, precisely because he worried about America's loss of prestige and hence, potentially, disequilibrium in the global order. Eisenhower had said in early October of 1956 that direct military action to oust Nasser "could not be taken where there is as much hostility as at present. For a thing like this to be done without inflaming the Arab world, a time free from heated stress holding the world's attention as at present would have to be chosen."[91] Ambassador Jefferson Caffrey had prefigured Eisenhower's views. If Arab nationalists were aroused, he had warned, the Suez would "explode with a loud bang at no distant date, an explosion with a potential chain reaction of occupation, revolution, eventual Commie domination."[92] It is not surprising that, in the wake of the curtailed invasion, the United States chose to handle Nasser through covert operations.[93] Hidden imperialism was preferable to direct imperialism, lest the world mobilize its anger against the American-dominated global order.

Even before the onset of the Cold War and the containment policy, and before the 1956 Suez fiasco, the postwar American state was concerned about displaying restraint in order to maintain the status quo. Here restraint was aimed not at the colonial or postcolonial world, but at its allies. We have seen that British officials from Wellington to Palmerston often militated against new colonial acquisitions on the grounds that it would incite envy or resentment from other states, unwittingly encourage them to also seek colonies, and ultimately threaten the balance of power. The American state did the same in the wake of World War II. When the Truman administration pondered seizing the former Japanese Pacific territories unilaterally after the war, it hesitated because of this very concern. Unilateral seizure would make the United States appear too greedy and set off, as Wm. Roger Louis puts it, "a new scramble for territory."[94] The State Department similarly worried that unilateral seizure of

[91] Quoted in Fraser 1992, p.118.

[92] Cairo to State Dept, 30 Nov 1951, FRUS 1951, V, p. 428; see also Lucas (2000), pp. 145–6.

[93] Lucas (2000), p. 152. Louis (1985), p. 414. The subsequent invasion by British and French forces invoked the Eisenhower administration's ire not only because the Americans had not been consulted, but also because the administration feared how the invasion would look to the rest of the world. Dulles hit the nail on the head: The invasion was "nothing but the straight old-fashioned variety of colonialism of the most obvious sort," and this the United States could not abide (ibid., p. 414).

[94] Louis (1978), p. 85.

the islands would invite Britain to reinitiate colonialism in the Middle East and threaten stability there.[95] Acquiring colonies would also undermine America's "moral prestige and political leadership" – as one State Department official put it – and run against "our general security policy."[96] Of course, later, as anticolonial nationalism and the Cold War extended its grip over the world, the United States would also restrain from colonial acquisitions lest third-world nationalists retaliate with ire. But in this immediate postwar period, one of the main worries was that territorial aggrandizement would set off other grabs for power and initiate a chain of destabilizing events, thereby threatening the geopolitical hierarchy upon which American hegemony rested.

Much more could be said about America's period of imperial abatement, but the similarities with the British state in the nineteenth century should be clear by now. As both the American and British states were economically dominant, both were intent on maintaining the status quo. This involved a policy of strategic restraint and therefore an aversion to direct imperialism. Rather than delegitimate their hegemony or upset the existing structure by blatant land grabbing or hasty military assaults, the two hegemonic states tried to cultivate imperial power by more indirect and hidden means.

Finally, understanding this process helps us apprehend the trends in imperial discourse. For both states, self-identification as "empire" was minimized during the hegemony period. This can be seen as part of an attempt to legitimate their global dominance and prevent inciting others. The historian A. P. Thornton's classic study of mid-Victorian British self-conception is telling. "In the view of all Englishmen of substance [in the 1840s and 1850s], whose own idols were progress, Free Trade, and the *pax Britannica*, 'Empire' was a foreign joss, whose worshippers, where they were not simply benighted, were assumed to be the sinister agents of the forces of wrong. Secure in that mid-Victorian power which was based jointly on the buoyancy of her economy and her navy, Great Britain had no need to pursue politics of national self-aggrandisement. Having no need, she had accordingly had no business to seek to do so."[97] This might apply equally well to American denials of empire in the mid-twentieth century.

[95] See FRUS 1945, I, pp. 140–1, 198–9; see also Friedman (1995), p. 353.
[96] Brynes quoted in Foltos (1989), p. 330.
[97] Thornton (1959), p. 1.

7

Conclusion

> To an outsider, the fact that America is an empire is the most obvious fact of all.
> – Henry Fairlie (1965)[1]

> The so-called American Empire is in fact a feeble imitation of the Roman, British, and French empires.
> – Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. (2005)[2]

It has become more common to think of the United States as an empire. Although some "empire deniers" persist, they face an increasingly loud chorus of post-revisionist scholars, pundits, and even officials who are willing to entertain the idea that the United States is and always has been imperial.[3] This book joins that chorus, but it has also sought to push further, dig a little deeper, and look more widely. Rather than seeking a warrant to call the United States an empire, this book has put America's imperial formation in comparative light. It has examined differences and similarities between America's imperial practices, forms, and dynamics on the one hand and Britain's imperialism on the other. The United States is and has been an empire; this book has examined its differences and similarities with its predecessor.

To be clear, this book has not been about world powers or "great powers." Empire is not the same thing as a great power. Nor has this book been concerned with every aspect of the two empires or every actor or group involved in the two empires. Such an analysis would hardly be possible in a single volume. Instead, in our search for similarities and differences, we have focused on the imperial policies, modalities, and forms exercised by the imperial state (rather than private corporations or transnational institutions). Furthermore,

[1] Fairlie (1965)
[2] Schlesinger (2005), p. 46.
[3] I take the term "empire deniers" from Tomes (2009), p. 538. Historian Charles Maier notes that "empire has displaced civil society as the fashionable political concept for the new decade." Maier (2006), p. 8.

we have covered only those imperial issues summoned by existing exceptionalist claims. Exceptionalism implies that the U.S. colonial empire has been more liberal, benign, and tutelary than other empires. Accordingly, Chapter 2 has tried to assess this claim by examining U.S. colonialisms in Puerto Rico and the Philippines, comparing them with other colonies in the U.S. empire, and comparing them all with Britain's. Similarly, exceptionalist thought suggests that America's nonterritorial imperialism in the twentieth century reflects America's domestic political values. Therefore, Chapters 3 and 4 explored the United States' and Britain's informal imperialism and the forces shaping them. In brief, the focus of this book has been on the exceptionalist themes implicitly and explicitly raised in existing discussions about American empire. The overarching goal of this book has been to assess these exceptionalist themes; to see how far exceptionalism gets us and perhaps look beyond.

The comparative method of the book has been precisely motivated. Rather than arbitrarily comparing the two empires or picking from the archive whatever suits our argument, the exploration has used economic historical phases as a guiding light. We have compared the policies, practices, and forms of the two empires by looking at them at comparable stages in the larger cycle of hegemony: ascent, hegemonic maturity, and decline. This has given some amount of control to an otherwise slippery comparison, enabling us to make sure that our comparative claims about the empires are not spurious. The method carries limitations of course. By using relative economic status in the world system as the guide, the analysis runs the risk of overlooking other important dimensions of the two empires. But the bet is that this comparative method offers greater analytic purchase than otherwise. At the very least, it enables us to better assess existing assertions of American exceptionalism that have not attempted to validate their claims through controlled comparisons.

What, then, does the book tell us of the exceptionalism thesis for understanding American power abroad? The conclusion here is unequivocal. Exceptionalism obscures more than it enlightens. It masks complex histories of imperial power exercised by both the U.S. and British empires. It overlooks important similarities between the two empires and blinds us to localized and sometimes global logics that shape imperial policies, practices, and processes. As both a set of claims about what happened and as explanatory framework, exceptionalism should be put to rest.

As a set of claims, exceptionalist thought has long posited a fundamental break between American and British history: The United States cast off English tyrannical monarchism and set a course for a new anti-imperial, liberal democratic future. Yet we have seen that the United States did not so much break with its English imperial past as it did pick up the mantle. It did so, first, as the original thirteen colonies expanded westward, adopting some of the same imperial tactics and techniques that the British had handed down. It did so again in the late nineteenth century, as it expanded overseas to rule colonies such as Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Guam, and Samoa, sometimes deploying modalities of colonial rule not unlike those of their British peers and, in some

cases, modeled directly on them. And it did so again after the Second World War. The American state first outsourced imperial functions to the British state. Then, once the British imperial formation began to fissure under the pressure of global anticolonial movements, the American state took over in the spaces the British empire (and European empires) left behind. To do so, the American state mobilized the very same tactics of informal empire that the British state had deployed in places like Africa and Latin America a century earlier. The United States did not denounce the imperial legacy it inherited; rather, it repeatedly deployed its forms.

We have also seen that the two empires developed similarly over time. Both began as settler empires expanding into contiguous areas. Both then moved farther and farther away from the metropolitan center, constructing administrative colonial empires that ruled a diversity of peoples. As the British empire expanded to Asia and Africa after 1815, it crafted colonial states employing multiple modalities of rule, ranging from assimilation projects to paternalistic protection to sheer repression. Likewise, as America's frontier expansion led to overseas expansion into the Caribbean and the Pacific, the United States crafted colonial regimes exhibiting similar variations in colonial governmentality. Finally, over the longer *dureé*, the American empire reiterated the waves of aggression initiated by its British predecessor. Following the same pattern of extension, abatement, and reassertion, the American empire summoned the tactics of the British empire while also replaying its historical dynamics – and perhaps, too, its foibles and follies. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la meme chose.*

Exceptionalism runs the risk of overlooking these similarities by claiming an essential difference between the American and British empires. It also occludes its own banality. Some historians have insisted that because the United States has produced so much exceptionalist anti-imperial scholarship, it must be intrinsically anti-imperial.[4] Yet this misses the fact that exceptionalist discourse itself is not unique: Britons in the nineteenth century likewise exhibited ambivalence about their empire, if they did not deny its existence entirely. When they did admit of empire, they saw it as uniquely benign and liberal – a distinct empire for liberty (as seen in Chapter 1). Even the historical swings and shifts in exceptionalist discourse are not unique to the American scene. During both states' hegemonic phases, imperial self-identification was much weaker than during the later period associated with the two states' new imperialisms or the earlier period of ascent. Exceptionalist thought in the two empires' hegemonic phases thus extended the imperial states' own historically specific global strategy. Just as the United States during its hegemonic mode preferred informal empire to formal rule and sought to legitimate itself to the world as a benign power, so too did exceptionalism's proponents portray the United States as an anti-imperial force. And just as the British empire in the mid-nineteenth century portrayed itself as a non-empire rooted in free trade rather than mercantilism, so too did many Britons hesitate to recognize the British empire as

[4] Suri (2009), p. 531.

an empire proper. Such shifts and cross-imperial comparisons invite us to historicize exceptionalism as a mode of thought. Rather than illuminating truths, exceptionalist thought (whether in its American or British variant) more likely reflects the empire's own shifting self-consciousness – not to mention its strategic public image. According to Karl Marx, bourgeois economics is bourgeois society's understanding of itself. It may be that, likewise, exceptionalist thought is empire's preferred self-apprehension.

None of this is to deny differences between the American and British imperial formations. Some scholars have already probed some differences in the two states' economic hegemonies and military capacities. Renowned historian Paul Kennedy remains amazed that the United States in 2000 accounted for close to 36 percent of world defense spending, far exceeding anything Britain might have mobilized during its heyday. "Nothing has ever existed like this disparity of power; nothing."[5] Still, the concern here is of the two states' imperial policies and practices, not their standing as great powers; and on this count there are differences too. America's approach to some of its colonies, for example, had a much more palpable and consistent tutelary character than Britain's. In Puerto Rico and the Philippines, the United States provided colonial institutions like elections and native offices much more swiftly than in Britain's colonies. Furthermore, after the Second World War and the subsequent acquisition of the former Japanese-mandated territories (current-day Micronesia), the United States did not seize any more colonies. Whereas Britain annexed new territory in the nineteenth century, the United States a century later resorted primarily to military occupations and informal tactics of imperial influence. Compared to Britain's, America's imperial formation since the mid-twentieth century has been much less territorially bound.

These differences cannot be overlooked. Exceptionalist thought surely does not overlook them. It seizes on them to validate its assertions. But let us remember: Difference is not the same thing as exceptionalism. Exceptionalism not only asserts difference; it sees the difference as unrivaled uniqueness – that is, everything else is the same and the United States deviates from that sameness. Furthermore, exceptionalism treats difference as essential, a matter of fundamental quality, not quantity, and explains difference between entities by reference to that essence. In this view, the United States deviates from the sameness – from the general rule – because of its unique national character and institutions.

The differences between the U.S. and British empires that we have found in this book are not of this sort. First, America's liberal governmentality in Puerto Rico and the Philippines was not reflective of an American essence: It was itself an exception in light of America's colonial policies in Guam and Samoa. Second, even America's approach to Puerto Rico and the Philippines was not entirely unrivaled; in comparative perspective, it appears as little else than a more extended form of Britain's preexisting approach to India – a

[5] Kennedy (2002).

matter of degree rather than fundamental kind. In addition, the reason for the tutelage approach in the Philippines and Puerto Rico had less to do with America's inherent character of culture than with preexisting local conditions in the two colonies conjoined with the colonial state's legitimacy imperative. Liberal policies in the colonies reflected the advanced political culture of the local colonial elite rather than the political culture of the United States.

The same goes for the other difference we have found. The American empire's reliance on informal modalities of power after World War II rather than formal colonialism was not determined by America's intrinsic qualities but rather by the qualities of the global field in which it operated. This is probably why the United States is not an exception even on this score: Few if any major states in the entire world have annexed territory in the mid- to late twentieth century.[6] Yet according to exceptionalism's logic, the United States should be the only nonterritorial imperialist. And according to exceptionalism's logic, China's current unwillingness to colonize Africa and its preference for informal methods of imperialism on that continent must mean that it is intrinsically anticolonial, that China's "national character" or "culture" militates against imperialism. It is hard to accept that claim.

Here we arrive at the other aspect of exceptionalism that this book challenges. Exceptionalism falters not only in its descriptive claims about what happened, but also in its explanations. According to exceptionalist thought, what the United States does is determined by what ostensibly it *is*: a benign liberal democracy with a deep anti-imperial tradition. The reason why the United States acts the way it does in the world is because of its so-called national style, its deep values, its constitution, or its culture. Presumably, colonial modes of rule or imperial policies are determined by America's national character, its cultural forms, or the dispositions of imperial personnel.[7] Here, however, the underlying problem with exceptionalism's explanatory regime is starkly disclosed: "methodological nationalism." Exceptionalism explains what the United States does in the world by isolating its "culture," "character," or "institutions" from wider relations, thus explaining outcomes by reference to internal factors alone.[8]

On this count, exceptionalism's mode of explanation bears similarities to traditional "metropolitan-centered" explanations of imperial expansion. Metropolitan-centered explanations explain what empires do in terms of what imperialists do and who they are. They explain colonial policies or imperial projects by reference to events, actors, institutions, or characters in the

[6] See data on rates of colonization in the world system in Bergesen and Schoenberg (1980).

[7] This mode of thought thus bears similarity to other arguments regarding "national character," such as the argument first articulated by David Hume who observed that European colonial practices in the Americas reflected each European nation's individual style and culture. Hume said: "the same set of manners will follow a nation, and adhere to them over the whole globe, as well as the same laws and languages. The Spanish, English, French and Dutch colonies are all distinguishable even between the tropics," quoted in Elliot (2006), p. xiv.

[8] On "methodological nationalism," see Wimmer and Schiller (2002) and Chernilo (2006).

imperial nation. They account for imperial dynamics by reference to imperial policy makers; they explain imperial exploitation by reference to metropolitan capitalists' tendencies; they reduce acts of imperial benevolence or liberality to imperial rulers' character or the imperial states' political institutions. They even explain imperial success or failure by reference to imperialists' sole agency. The pro-empire neo-revisionist commentator Niall Ferguson urges Americans to own up to America's imperial tendencies but only so that it might be a better empire. The implicit assumption is that American empire would be successful if only Americans had the proper will and commitment; as if empire succeeds or fails based on the imperialists themselves.[9]

Historians Robinson and Gallagher long ago mounted an assault against such metropolitan-centered thinking. To understand why Britain expanded in the late nineteenth century, they urged, we have to look beyond forces at home and instead attend to dynamics in the periphery where colonization was actually taking place. As opposed to a metrocentric explanation, they proposed an "excentric" one.[10] This was meant for investigating the causes of Britain's new imperialism in the late nineteenth century, but its general principle can be applied to more than just imperial expansion. It can be enlisted to transcend exceptionalism's explanations of imperial forms and practices – as well as its portrayal of empire more broadly.

In explaining what the United States does by reference to a presumably unique American "national character," exceptionalism portrays empires as entities with special characteristics or styles rooted in the imperial nations' values, institutions, and traditions. It thus paints empires as monolithic states whose policies and practices are determined by those essential characteristics. Empires are shaped from within. The evidence marshaled in this book offers a different approach entirely. First, rather than seeing empires as monolithic essences, it seems them as *imperial formations* with potentially conflicting tendencies, tactics and techniques, and multiple modalities of power that do not always add up to a coherent style or singular character. Across the empire at any given point in time, a variety of policies and practices are mobilized; over time they are substituted, replaced, transferred, or modified, and the imperial formation as a whole undergoes shifts, transformations, extensions, and contractions. In both America's colonial empire and Britain's colonial empire, there were a variety of colonial regimes and governmentalities, ranging from paternalistic protection to tutelary assimilation; both imperial states deployed informal mechanisms of influence in other parts of the world; and both states later substituted some direct methods for indirect ones while undergoing various historical waves of aggression in the longer run. One is hard pressed to find homogeneity or national essences here.

Second, rather than seeing empires as shaped only from within, the analysis in this book sees empires as *located in wider global fields of conflict and*

[9] Ferguson (2004).
[10] Robinson (1972), Robinson (1986).

competition as they reach across, through, and down to more localized settings of power relations. Embedded in and moving about these fields and power relations, empires are in turn shaped by them. They project their power on a global scale, but adapt their techniques and forms to better suit the global fields they seek to dominate. They rule natives but sometimes also "go native," adapting themselves to local conditions and to the spaces and places they seek to rule – if only to better rule them.[11] And they sometimes shift, redirect, or modify their imperial policies and practices depending on the character of the local fields in which they operate and the place they occupy within those fields. Imperial formations change over time, and their changes depend in part on the dynamics of the wider arena and the imperial states' position in it. To be sure, as seen in Chapter 6, during both their periods of hegemony, the U.S. and British empires preferred "informal" imperialism and adopted seemingly "anti-imperial" promarket stances resulting from their hegemonic status. Here, the two empires did what they did partly because of the wider relations in which they were embedded and, even more importantly, their dominant place within those relations. Sitting at the apex of the global system, they had an interest in abating their aggression and shifting toward informal tactics. The structural position of the empire at the time – not its internal character or culture, its institutions or traditions – helps explain the empires' activities.

In sum, as opposed to methodological nationalism and metropolitan-centered theories, the approach to empire culled from this book emphasizes various scales of determination beyond the imperial nation itself. Exceptionalism's analysis of national essences must be replaced with an analysis of local and global relations.[12]

The point is not to discard metropolitan determinants entirely. Colonial agents overseas will carry some influences with them as they craft policies and strategize on the ground. In the imperial state itself there are a variety of actors, from presidents and prime ministers to parliamentarians and congressmen, judges and jurists – all of whom reside within the metropole, and so will be influenced to some degree by what happens there (including, in some cases, domestic public opinion). Ultimately, imperial policies have to be forged by actors in the metropole.[13] But this book has tried to show that sometimes metropolitan factors in themselves are not determinant; that nonmetropolitan factors must also be taken into account. It has tried to show that sometimes nonmetropolitan factors can matter more than domestic forces, if only to influence

[11] This might apply not only to the U.S. or British empire, but probably also to other empires as well, from the French to the Ottoman to the Russian. See especially for the Ottoman empire Barkey (2008); for the Russian empire, see Lieven (2002). For an impressive macro comparative view, see Cooper and Burbank (2010).

[12] In social science parlance, the epistemology of exceptionalist thought exemplifies "essentialism," whereas the approach in this book adopts "relationalism." On essentialism versus relationalism in sociology, see Emirbayer (1997).

[13] For an examination of domestic factors shaping foreign policy that does not fall prey to exceptionalist thought, see Zelizer (2010).

exactly what policies and imperial programs actors in the metropole formulate and enact.

The point, then, is not to hastily discount the possibility that metropolitan forces matter. It is to challenge the exceptionalist assumption that those factors amount to a singular essence or character. Rather than a singular political culture or set of monolithic political beliefs and values, it is more likely that the United States, as with Britain before, has had tendencies within it of *both* imperialism and anti-imperialism, of benign posturing and ruthless exploitation, of liberal governmentality and more illiberal tyranny – as well as shades in between. Why one tendency becomes more dominant rather than another, why empires formulate one policy or deploy one modality and not the other – such things are likely the result of a host of factors, rather than just factors within the metropole. In the story told in previous chapters, we have seen some of those factors (not least the particular structure of the field in which the empires happened to be operating and the empires' place in the overarching global structure).

The related point, finally, is not to entirely discount metropolitan determinants, but instead overturn the still-dominant exceptionalist assumption that everything that happens flows outward from the metropole, as if power were only a one-way street, as if empires can be analytically extracted from the spaces they inhabit or the peoples they dominate. Empires might wish for these things. But global structures can overwhelm and alter imperial designs; the agency of subject peoples can thwart, reshape, and transform them too. Our theories should capture this banality of power; they should reflect the messy realities of power's applications.[14] Exceptionalist histories realize in theory what empires wish for in practice. Our theories can and should do better.

Still, if this book offers a critique of exceptionalism and an alternative analytic approach to empire, why bother? Is such a critique of exceptionalism still worth making? The proliferation of empire talk might suggest that exceptionalism as a mode of thought has already reached its limits, that exceptionalism at best is a specter that haunts lesser minds only. Yet the stubborn persistence of exceptionalist themes in some sectors of scholarship suggests otherwise. Even as an increasing number of scholars treat American empire as worthy of examination, skeptics remain.[15] Besides, admitting the existence of American empire does not in itself overthrow exceptionalism as an analytic framework. The notion of an exceptional American empire endures, as does the explanatory regime that lends primacy to metropolitan factors. Exceptionalism remains a deep and powerful mode of thought in scholarly investigation: Even some critics of exceptionalism (and, for that matter, critics of American imperialism) do not always challenge its foundations. For example, some criticisms claim that

[14] On the "banality of power" in the African postcolonial context, see Mbembe (1992).

[15] See, for instance, the refusal to see the United States as an "empire" in Suri (2009); others refuse to stake a claim either way (e.g., Maier [2006]). For a recent reinscription of exceptionalism for understanding U.S. development, see Rauchway (2006).

American imperialism has *not* been benign and virtuous, if only because it was not benign and virtuous in the first place (rather exploitative, racist, and violent), or because true American "ideals" and "character" have been corrupted by imperialism.[16] As the diametric opposite of exceptionalist thought, these criticisms risk carrying its problematic assumption that empires first and foremost express the national character of the metropole or the will of its people. Agency is reserved for the imperialists.

Exceptionalism remains powerful outside scholarship too. Everyday language is filled with talk of an "American way." Perhaps by the same token, exceptionalist themes continue to shape foreign policy. Donald Kagan (Yale historian and formerly of the influential policy group called "Project for the New American Century") insists that "all comparisons between America's current place in the world and anything legitimately called an empire in the past reveal ignorance and confusion about any reasonable meaning of the concept empire."[17] Furthermore, recent U.S. presidents from Reagan to Bush the Elder to Bush the Younger have shown themselves to be believers in American exceptionalism, and their beliefs have probably provided some of the ideological arsenal for American military interventions. At the very least, exceptionalism has underpinned American hubris.[18] "America is a Nation with a mission," declared George W. Bush in his Inaugural Address of 2004, still amidst the second Iraq War, "and that mission comes from our most basic beliefs. We have no desire to dominate, no ambitions of empire."

Pundits have wondered whether President Barack Obama is a "post-imperial" president.[19] But we might also wonder: Is he a post-exceptionalist president too? Consider his major speech on foreign affairs, titled "A New Beginning," given in 2009. On the one hand, President Obama reiterates exceptionalist denials of empire: "America is not the crude stereotype of a self-interested empire. The United States has been one of the greatest sources of progress that the world has ever known. We were born out of revolution against an empire. We were founded upon the ideal that all are created equal, and we have shed blood and struggled for centuries to give meaning to those words – within our borders, and around the world." On the other hand, elsewhere in the speech, the president admits to America's role in the overthrow of Iranian

[16] William Appleman Williams argues that American foreign policy has been guided by "three ideals": (1) a "humanitarian impulse," (2) "the principle of self-determination," and (3) the idea that foreign societies should "improve their lives." The "tragedy," however, is that American foreign policy has failed to live up to these ideals in practice: "America's humanitarian urge to assist other peoples is undercut – even subverted – by the way it goes about helping them." Williams (1972), pp. 13, 15.

[17] Kagan (2002)

[18] President George W. Bush's speech in 2004 to the Philippine Congress justifying the Iraq War and continued U.S. military support of Manila's campaign against Islamic separatists in the southern Philippines is but one example. On exceptionalism's influence on American human rights policy, see Ignatieff (1995).

[19] Zakaria (2009).

president Mohammed Mosaddiq in 1953. "For many years, Iran has defined itself in part by its opposition to my country, and there is indeed a tumultuous history between us. In the middle of the Cold War, the United States played a role in the overthrow of a democratically elected Iranian government."[20] Here Obama figures as a revisionist exceptionalist, or perhaps even a liberal exceptionalist. By referring to the overthrow in 1953, he admits America's imperial tendencies. Yet he also insists on America's potential for a benevolent imperialism based on America's national character and founding ideals.

President Obama's liberal exceptionalism is strikingly resonant with the exceptionalist discourse seen throughout this book. Also resonant is the fact that his speech was given in Cairo, Egypt. This was where, in 1882, some 20,000 British troops also stood, having mounted an assault on the Suez Canal and seized Cairo. British troops would occupy the country for another seventy-two years. President Obama's speech did not refer to that. Nor did it refer to the fact that Obama would soon call for additional troops to be deployed in Afghanistan where British troops had also been, multiple times. In 1878, for example, just four years before the invasion of Egypt, British commanders led close to 40,000 forces into Afghanistan from three different points, beginning an attack that led to an occupation, an apparent peace, and then an unexpected anti-British uprising that left the British envoy killed. This summoned the return of British forces soon after. Although the British did not remain too long, they did return again to Afghanistan after September 11, 2001, alongside American troops. The world's past and present hegemonic empires have not only been similar, they continue to be conjoined.

But for how long? Britain's imperial determination has already abated. In December 2010, a year after President Obama gave his speech in Cairo, the new British prime minister, David Cameron, vowed not to deploy any more British troops in Afghanistan, thus declaring Britain's imminent withdrawal.[21] Conversely, America's imperial activities persist. As 2010 approached, President Obama vowed to increase the number of American soldiers in Afghanistan. He called upon 21,000 more to join the fight. He also called for enhanced operations in neighboring areas in Pakistan. His justification should be eerily familiar: "[W]e will use all elements of our national power to defeat al Qaeda, and to defend America, our allies, and all who seek a better future. Because the United States of America stands for peace and security, justice and opportunity. That is who we are, and that is what history calls on us to do once more."[22] This marks a persistent if not stubborn empire. It also marks an enduring exceptionalism upon which the sun has not yet set.

[20] The White House Web site names it "A New Beginning." See www.whitehouse.gov/blog/NewBeginning (accessed June 30, 2010).

[21] "David Cameron Signals Afghan Withdrawal," *The Guardian*, December 7, 2010 (http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/dec/07/david-cameron-afghanistan; accessed February 18, 2011).

[22] "Remarks by the President on a New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan," White House Press Release, March 27, 2009, (http://m.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-on-a-New-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan; accessed February 1, 2011).

This is frightening. If the story in this book tells us something, it is that empires that insist on their exceptionality do not behave well. And self-fashioned exceptional empires that are falling behave worse still. In this sense, our affair in Iraq and Afghanistan may just be a portent. Something more is coming.

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