THE U.S EMPIRE AND NORTHEAST ASIA

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I. EVOLUTION OF THE AMERICAN EMPIRE

The roots of the American empire begin at the end of the nineteenth century, when the U.S. took the Philippines from Spain, and embarked upon a colonial adventure that made it the Asian power it remains today. This American empire became fully global in World War II. The old empires of Western Europe that had expanded and fought each other since the 16th century were in ruins, and two new global forces emerged in their stead to succeed to global hegemony. Driven as much by Wilsonian and Leninist ideology as economic interests, the American and Soviet empires gathered allies, established spheres of influence, engaged in hugely expensive arms expenditures, and went to war on the frontiers between them. U.S. pursuit of the Cold War against the Soviet Union and vice versa remained the dominant theme of international politics until the latter's collapse in late 1991.

Over the next decade, America under Clinton appeared willing to pursue world peace and order in tandem with the United Nations, or to work within a multilateral framework that made U.S. power less fearsome to the rest of the world. An assortment of interventions, including Kuwait, Haiti, Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo, could be characterized as partly humanitarian, partly multilateral, and only tangentially involving U.S. interests. The sun had set on old empires in 1945, and appeared to vanish on the horizon of the modern sovereign nation-state. A new international order, underwritten by U.S. military and economic power, was emerging. The 2000 election of George W.

Bush saw no alteration of that prospect, until the suicide hijackings on September 11, 2001.

First the U.S.-led attacks against the Taliban in Afghanistan, and then the invasion and liberation of Iraq, transformed the general perception of the U.S. from friendly giant to power-hungry, imperialist military-industrial machine. While the Bush administration maintains that its Iraq intervention carries out the spirit and intent of the United Nations' numerous resolutions, liberates the people from an unspeakable tyrant, and provides a new start for an Arab democracy, critics see a new monolith, seeking new sources of wealth, energy resources, and investment.

II. AMERICAN EMPIRE IN EAST ASIA

A. Incomplete sovereignty

While the Middle East and Central Asia are now considered by U.S. critics to be areas of contemporary American expansion, East Asia has been a region with a much longer record of Pax Americana, and thus a more continuous part of the putative American empire. "Incomplete sovereignty" is a term that can describe the conditions of East Asian states, and underlies the instability of the current framework of post-colonial empire in the region. By incomplete sovereignty, I refer to the phenomenon of states lacking a critical segment of state sovereignty. For China, this means the *de facto* absence of jurisdiction over Taiwan. For the Korean state, division of the peninsula into two halves nullifies full sovereignty. Japan, as penalty for waging unilateral war in the past, has weakened its sovereign right of defence under Article Nine of the constitution, and relies on the US-Japan Security Treaty as a major prop of national security. Under these conditions, the role of the U.S. as balancer of power and security prop for the

democratic (multi-party) states in the region is indispensable. Were the U.S. to unilaterally withdraw from its commitments, it is not likely that China, Japan, and Korea would amicably settle their differences, nor that the UN could prevent PRC blockade or attack on Taiwan, rearming of Japan, or resumption of the Korean War. To understand how the American empire emerged by default in East Asia, a survey of some key historical developments is crucial.

III. THE FIVE STAGES OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

The first stage of the American Pacific empire began in 1898 with the annexation of Hawaii, and the Spanish American War. Although Cuba was the *casus belli*, the Philippines were a major prize, and on May 1, 1898, Admiral Dewey defeated the Spanish squadron in Manila Bay in six hours. The American evolution of its relationship with the Philippines illustrates the stages of the American empire. In this brief war, the U.S. played the European game of imperial expansion by conquest and annexation – the unapologetic nineteenth century progress of empire, with superior nations demonstrating virility through acquisition of colonies. By winning the Philippines, America would have a major foothold and trade entrepot in East Asia, with Manila to become an American Hong Kong. Through the centuries of the Spanish empire, the port of Manila had transferred treasures and spices from Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia across the Pacific to Acapulco, carried overland to Vera Cruz, and thence to Spain. For the new American conquerors, the Pacific represented the new frontier where Manifest Destiny awaited new invigoration, and the Philippines would be the gate to commerce in China, as well as a limit to Japanese southward expansion.

The vulnerability of the Philippine and Hawaii outposts was demonstrated on December 7, 1941, when both were simultaneously attacked by the Japanese. After liberation in 1945, the Philippines were granted independence, though still it remained a U.S. protectorate, with major U.S. ownership of assets, and a number of American military bases. Clark Air Field and Subic Bay Naval Base were most important during the Vietnam war, and was ceded to the Philippines upon the demands of a nationalistic Philippines Senate in 1992. With the rise in Abu Sayef terrorism, American military advisors are again active in support for Philippines security.

Stage two followed World War I. With Wilsonian declarations of global liberation, benevolent imperialism became tutelage in democracy with preparation for independence, though by staying out of the League of Nations, the U.S. may have foregone an opportunity to implement its ideals. Subsequently, in East Asia, Japanese conquests and defeats of European empires demonstrated that Asians could master modern military technology and establish modern sovereign nation-states as effective successors to subordinate colonial regimes. FDR and other U.S. leaders incorporated the rhetoric of liberation into wartime and postwar aims, and withheld support from the French and Dutch who tried to re-impose colonial regimes on unwilling Indochinese and Indonesians. Setting the example, Truman granted the Philippines independence on July 4, 1946.

Stage three began shortly after World War II. Winston Churchill (March 5, 1946) declared the communist “iron curtain,” was dividing Europe and awakened many to the unwelcome new realities. Creation of Soviet-backed “people’s republics” in Eastern Europe, the Berlin Blockade, as well as communist advances in China and North Korea

alerted Americans to the veracity of Churchill's warnings. Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Nixon and Reagan marshaled U.S. foreign and defence policy around the principle of resisting and rolling back Communism. Competition with the Soviet Union established a new set of strategic criteria for U.S. pan-Pacific relations. In Southeast Asia, homegrown nationalist movements competed, and sometimes merged with, communist partisans to overthrow colonial or local regimes – partially succeeding in French Indochina in 1954. In the Philippines, the communist and socialist Huks (Hukbalahaps) had fought the Japanese, and emerged after the war as a formidable force in central Luzon. Their insurgency lasted from 1948 until 1954, and was repressed by the indigenous government with U.S. support. Similar guerrilla insurgencies occurred elsewhere in Southeast Asia: Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Indonesia. A common feature was their anti-Japanese roots, postwar success in mobilizing peasant support, and increasing linkage with communist parties. As a result, the so-called "people's wars", though claiming to fight for justice and freedom, became proxy wars between the U.S. and the Soviet Union/communist China for control of contested Third World countries. This new strategic environment was full of political and moral ambiguity for America. At the ideological level, the U.S. found itself supporting governments that were often corrupt dictatorships in the name of defeating the anticipated worse fate of communist successes. Policy-makers sought to convince the public that once the threat of communist subversion or conquest was defeated, American support for democratic reform would get back on track.

Although this pattern of anti-communism at any price appeared to move the United States into the behavior mode of ends justifying the means, it was not without

merit. South Korea, under a series of dictators from Syngman Rhee to Chun Doo Hwan, underwent a mammoth industrialization and transformation of the economy, and finally full democratization in 1987, while the North stagnated under one of the harshest dictatorships in human history. Similarly, the Guomindang on Taiwan exercised single-party dictatorship through two generations of the Chiang family, and has emerged as a modern, prosperous, and democratic society today. In Vietnam, where the U.S. fought and withdrew, tens of thousands of refugees fled in boats or overland to China, and the economy still under-performs under a repressive communist dictatorship.

Stage four of modern U.S. foreign policy can be characterized as multilateralism and the partnership with the UN, roughly the decade from 1992 to late 2001, following the end of the Cold War. The Gulf War against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait had set the stage for a new world order. U.S. military power was primarily for defence of America, her allies, and her national interests, but in the new era of reduced security threats, that power became something of a surplus commodity that could deployed abroad for humanitarian and peacekeeping purposes, although administrations preferred "nation-building" as the covering rationale. This fourth stage American empire was decentralized, with American military power available for multilateral and international missions, at the service of the United Nations or NATO. Under Clinton, internationalism was integrated into U.S. foreign policy, while providing cover for the peace dividend of reduced military spending.

In 2001, the American empire was transformed into its fifth and current stage: "Empire Lite", to use the term coined by Michael Ignatieff. He describes it as "hegemony without colonies; global sphere of influences without the burdens of direct administration

and the risks of daily policing"[1] As Empire Lite, the U.S. authorizes itself to intervene in trouble spots where there are short-term or long-term threats to its fundamental national interests. The burden will be spread as widely as possible, since many threats, such as the spread of WMD or terrorism, threaten the wider global community and cannot be countered by unilateral action. The post-Cold War partnership between the U.S. and UN has soured over Iraq, with many of its members opposed to U.S. actions and actively interfering in the enforcement of its own resolutions.

IV. DYNAMICS OF THE AMERICAN EMPIRE

With this rough historical map of the last century, we can see the evolution of U.S. empire in the north Pacific. It is the child of war and revolution, and after initial enthusiasm to join the empires of advanced nations, was reluctantly expanded when old empires dissolved and left problems in their wake. Wilsonism suggested that self-determination and independence would resolve many local problems, but Leninism-Stalinism-Maoism threatened to suffocate any prospect of democracy in the new nations. For a country that had successfully taken on and defeated Kaiserism and Fascism, the challenge of world communism was no less a threat. Millions of refugees from North Korea, China, Eastern Europe, and other states threatened by communism testified to the massive human rejection of rule by terror and gulag. For America to ignore consolidation and expansion of communist tyranny would be worse than returning to isolation – it would make the country a silent partner that had defeated totalitarianism but had learned nothing from the crusade. Other explanations for the American empire have been offered:

1 Ignatieff, M. (2003), 2.

A. Marxist economics

Charles Beard and his economic interpretation of the U.S. constitution instructed several generations of American scholars in the art of economic deconstruction. Since the Spanish-American war, the context and content of the American empire has undergone several mutations. Economic plunder is touted as the common thread of empires. U.S. "colonial" or "*dependencia*" relations with Latin America, the lore of the United Fruit Company in central America, the alleged CIA overthrow of Allende, and U.S. liberation of Iraq as a cover for a petroleum grab provide fuel for the Marxist/economic causality perspective.

B. *Raison d'etat*: Strategic pursuit of American national interests

As a global power with global interests, the U.S. cannot retreat behind *Festung Amerika* and ignore events abroad. Post-World War I isolation and a demoralized Western Europe contributed to the rise of fascism and militarism that ultimately broke out in World War II. Had Britain and France used force and resisted Hitler's re-occupation of the Rhineland in violation of the Versailles treaty, perhaps the world's most destructive war could have been avoided.

C. Action-reaction

Chalmers Johnson's sophisticated analysis of the American empire sees it driven by the military-industrial complex, with the military operating almost as a state within the state – pursuing its own objectives, demanding an ever-increasing share of national wealth in the form of new weapons and privileges, while feeding the industrial side with hugely expensive weapons systems procurement. The mechanics of empire are a form of Newtonian physics – "blowback" is the foreign reaction to American actions. Every

American action causes a reaction that either resists further U.S. intervention, or accumulates into a reservoir of hate and resentment that periodically explodes.

D. Ideological: global expansion of democracy

One can go back to the American founding fathers for evidence that they saw themselves creating not only a new government, but a new political order for the benefit of mankind. Manifest Destiny was not only a mission to benefit Americans, but promised to liberate all peoples from ignorance and oppression. Wilson, and later FDR, announced the global mission of America to the world, while most recently George Bush described the U.S. goal of bringing democracy to the Arab world. Indeed, the U.S. has fought many battles, and sacrificed many lives and much treasure to liberate peoples, and rarely took territory or concessions. Many Americans hope that this self-vision would be accepted at face value, but it is contradicted by other facts and interpretations.

E. Historical

A century is too complex to lend itself to any single explanation without distorted simplification. Each generation – and each American president - sees the world from a different perspective and makes a series of choices that culminate in foreign policy, war and peace. There are common threads in the American empire, but they are colored by the particularities of each age. The Cold War period, when the contemporary American empire reached maturity, comprised nearly a half century of reciprocal threat – MAD or mutually assured destruction – and the U.S. responded with military alliances, weapons R & D, propaganda, psywar, economic development aid, and any other resource in the arsenal of a modern industrial nation. The East Asian context was more complicated with the emergence of new, very diverse nations and a self-transforming Chinese

revolution that required more dynamic responses than Europe, where NATO v. Warsaw Pact served as the stable axis of confrontation. In sum, the Cold War was an epochal phenomenon with regional components, and the character of the American empire was the result of American decisions about the degree of threat from the communist empire. Those decisions and institutions have had profound – though not determining – effect on the fourth and fifth stages of U.S. foreign policy.

V. EMPIRE AS A LEGACY OF THE COLD WAR

Wilsonian ideals had their place in U.S. plans for global reorganization after World War II. The Japanese empire was dismembered by force, and self-determination would govern the disposition of former colonies. While nationalism in Japan had taken the forms of imperialism and militarism, Korean and Chinese nationalists were publicly committed to creating polities along democratic lines approved by the U.S. Korean and Chinese communists were initially regarded as fringe groups that would be difficult to incorporate into new postwar governments. Stalin's sponsorship seemed manageable as long as he played the great game of global politics in the international conferences. He used tactics of united front and agitprop according to Soviet interests, and would sacrifice foreign communist parties without a second thought. Postwar Americans failed to recognize that several of the communist parties had developed indigenous roots and represented nationalist sentiment that would backlash against Moscow and prove as strong as or stronger than the bourgeois nationalism of Syngman Rhee and Chiang Kai-shek. Washington assumed that defeat of Japan would lead to establishment of new sovereign states in China and Korea which would fit into the new world order of

cooperation among the victors of World War II, with a United Nations representing the community nations.

FDR underestimated both Leninism and Stalin – Leninism was only half about ruling the USSR. It was also an ideology and agenda of Soviet foreign policy, advocating world revolution through communist parties which would seize power as the Bolsheviks had in 1917. Supremely disciplined and trained in the Soviet Union, their small numbers belied their capabilities. Sometimes merging in united fronts with bourgeois parties, then discarding their partners like squeezed lemons, their ruthless pursuit of state power could then be consolidated with Soviet arms, advice, and financial support.

In East Asia, U.S. responses took forms specific to each country:

A. The Korean Peninsula

The American relationship with Korea illustrates the post World War I promises of national self-determination which inspired Korean nationalists to demand independence from Japanese colonial rule. The Taft-Katsura agreement (July 29, 1904) gave Japan a free hand in Korea, while Japan accepted the presence of the U.S. in the Philippines and Hawaii. The Japanese (even in contemporary textbooks) characterized nationalist demonstrations as riots, and brutally repressed leaders, jailing and executing many, while others escaped abroad. The Japanese moved quickly to take control of Korea, and established the protectorate that lasted until 1945.

To facilitate surrender of Japanese troops, the U.S. and the Soviet Union temporarily divided the Korean Peninsula across the 38th parallel – a line that became permanent. With communization of China and the Cold War, the southern half of Korea

was transformed from a zone of optional U.S. protection, into a critical buffer to shield Japan from communist intimidation. The huge human and material investment of the U.S. in the Korean War, and the subsequent continuous commitment of U.S. forces enabled South Korea to defend itself against further incursion from North Korea, and also provided an environment in which industrialization, capitalist prosperity, and liberal democracy have flourished. The U.S. commitment also guaranteed the postwar Japanese economic miracle would not succumb to remilitarization.

Jimmy Carter, in his election campaign of 1976, promised to pull U.S. troops out of South Korea without any quid pro quo from North Korea - a position later modified. In the end, more than 3600 troops were withdrawn. Decades of North Korean threat, and development of nuclear weapons justified the presence of about 37,000 U.S. troops in the Republic of Korea, though this number will probably be reduced in the coming years as the U.S. relies more on sea power to maintain its security posture in the region.[2] Despite decades of dictatorship, both civilian and military, the Republic of Korea transformed itself into a multi-party democracy in the late 1980s.

B. Japan

Japan and Germany were defeated antagonists whose transformation to modern industrial and democratic nations under American tutelage may be instructive in the contemporary neo-con vision of remaking the Arab world – one dictatorship at a time.

Both Japan and Germany underwent victors' occupation, and the latter became a Cold War battlefield. War crimes trials were designed to expose the responsibility and

2 The Washington Times, November 24, 2003. http://www.washtimes.com/world/20031124-124422-7024r.htm.

crimes against humanity committed by former government and military leaderships – thoroughly discrediting them in the eyes of the world and their countries' citizens.[3]

In Japan, a single occupation force under General Douglas MacArthur (Supreme Command Allied Powers, SCAP) centralized nation-building powers and introduced a series of reforms that restored the prewar democratic thrust had been derailed by hyper-nationalism in the 1930s. Repressive laws were abolished, and land reform was implemented to give farmers a greater stake in the new order. The occupation revised the education system to reflect democratic values, and rewrote the labor code to provide workers with more rights. SCAP wrote a constitution which preserved the symbolism of the emperor as a concession to conservatives, but was progressive in other sections, including Article Nine, prohibiting Japan from going to war again.[4] Under U.S. sponsorship, at San Francisco in 1950, Japan signed a peace treaty with most of the countries it had invaded. A peace and friendship treaty with the PRC was signed only in August 1978, and a treaty with Russia has yet to be concluded.

The Chinese communist revolution and the collapse of U.S. wartime ally Chiang Kai-shek, followed by the invasion of South Korea by the Soviet-supported North Koreans delivered the initial Cold War shocks in Asia. From transforming Japan into a modern progressive democracy, U.S. policy shifted to making the country into a forward base for American military forces in the region. Rapid reindustrialization occurred under the stimulus of providing logistical support in the Korean War. The Japanese Self

3 Some regarded the trials a sham. Andrei Vyshinsky, Stalin's state prosecutor during the Great Purge Trials, accused the Nazis of crimes committed by the Soviets – the murder of 15,000 Polish officers in the Katyn Forest.

4 The key sentiment was embodied in the clause: "the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as a mean of settling international disputes."

Defense Forces were formed to replace U.S. military personnel who were redeployed to Korea. In government and economics, the “reverse course” took place – a halting or reversal of policies such as dissolving the zaibatsu, or removing prewar and wartime officials from political life.

With the Korean War, Japan and the Korean Peninsula could no longer be treated as separate entities. Japan’s old description of Korea as a “knife pointed at the heart of Japan” was insinuated into American strategic thinking. South Korea was important in its own right, but was also a critical buffer against Chinese and North Korean threats to Japan. Throughout the Cold War period, Japanese foreign policy closely adhered to United States directions, though Japan was spared sending troops to Vietnam. The Japanese contribution to American security in the Pacific region was to provide land for bases, particularly in Okinawa. LDP hegemony over national government in Japan for nearly half a century was based on its pro-U.S. foreign policy, U.S. market access for Japanese manufactures, and low defence spending. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Cold War justification for pro-U.S. policy evaporated, and with it, the LDP hold over government.

Was U.S. domination of Japan a “bad thing”? Chalmers Johnson sees the relationship as analogous to Soviet-East Germany, and Japanese democracy as an oligarchy subservient to American masters, with the irony that the Japanese economy rebounded to become the major competitor to American economic hegemony. On the other hand, the US-Japan Security Treaty has quieted Asian fears of Japanese remilitarization that might have occurred without the U.S. presence. Also, the 1947 constitution, despite largely American authorship, has provided an umbrella for a

modicum of conservative democracy, particularly at local levels, where opposition parties have been more successful.

C. China

The size, longevity and power of the ancient Chinese empire did not prevent its downward spiral and collapse in the first decade of the twentieth century. When the U.S., seconded by Great Britain, demanded the maintenance of China's territorial integrity in the Open Door policy, it was not altruism but self-interest. China had become the sick man of Asia, and her vulnerability after the Boxer uprising heralded a carved feast for the great powers, similar to the spheres of influence that followed the Ottoman collapse, or the colonies that reduced Africa to one or two independent states. During World War II, Generalissimo and Mrs. Chiang Kai-shek became heroes of resistance, and China would be a junior partner in the postwar settlement of Asian reconstruction of peace and order.

When the communists came to power in 1949, they not only radically transformed Chinese government and society, but betrayed American hopes for a democratic and open society which would continue the special relationship nurtured by diplomats, missionaries, and traders. To China, especially with her entry into the Korean War, the U.S. became tantamount to the Great Satan. Mao's pilgrimage to Moscow in early 1950 and the signing of the Sino-Soviet treaty of alliance hardened the battle lines of the Cold War. Until Nixon's visit to Beijing in 1972, the Sino-American mutual antagonism underlay both countries' deployments, activities, and policies in Asia. U.S. support for Taiwan was meant to protect a relatively free society from communist invasion, while the presence of U.S. forces in Japan and South Korea were to prevent a

resumption of the Korean War which had not ended, but only halted under a military armistice. American bases in Okinawa, the Philippines, and Thailand gave added credibility to U.S. alliances in the region.

China's relations were more complex. A border dispute with India broke out into fighting in the Himalayas. Overt friction between China and the Soviet Union since 1960 erupted into military clashes in 1969. While Vietnam was touted as a test case of people's war and the weakness of American military might, Nixon and Kissinger recognized that it had less strategic importance than the growing rift between China and the USSR. Although Sino-American diplomatic normalization was not official until the first day of 1979, the basic principles – including U.S. de-recognition of Taiwan – allowed a closer working relationship during the interim. The Deng reforms and subsequent rapid economic growth of China have resulted in increased cooperation between China and the U.S., though Washington's policy is best described as engagement plus containment, and China reciprocates American suspicions of intentions.

An attribute of traditional empires was the establishment of defensible frontiers. Hadrian's wall and the Great Wall of China demarcated empire from barbarians. By 1950, the security frontier of the new American empire started with the Aleutians, southwest to the main islands of Japan, and thence to the Philippines. In his famous speech to the Washington Press Club on January 12, 1950, US Secretary of State Dean Acheson excluded South Korea and Taiwan. This was taken as a sign by North Korea that the U.S. would not defend South Korea if it were attacked. Japan, Okinawa, Philippines, and the Aleutians were inside the invisible Maginot perimeter to be

defended. The line was revised with the North Korean invasion of South Korea in 1950. Even though the Cold War is over today, and Sino-American relations flourish as well as they have in the past half century, the frontier remains as operable as the Mason-Dixon Line in antebellum America.

The line represents the limits of U.S. interests, but has not been an arbitrary boundary. Each ally (or implied and limited protectorate, in the case of Taiwan) has its local claims of jurisdiction tied to territorial, as much as security, considerations. Japan claims the four islands. comprising the Northern Territories, currently occupied by Russia, and occupies the Senkakus claimed by China. South Korea has its claims on Tokdo, while Taiwan continues to occupy Quemoy and Matsu, as well as the Penghu (the Pescadores). Island disputes abound in the South China Sea. Except for the offshore islands held by Taiwan, these disputes have had little effect on U.S. delineation of its Western Pacific security frontier.

Sino-American relations are flourishing in trade, investment, and other sectors, but the two empires[5] remain implicit adversaries despite cooperation in a number of important areas. Taiwan remains a potential powder keg. FDR hoped that postwar China, either under Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek or some other leader friendly to the U.S., would preside over a regional order that was part of the UN global structure. In the four-year civil war after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the communists under Mao Zedong drove the Guomindang forces out of Northeast China, then from their Yangzi

5 China can also be considered an empire. Her ambition is to resume the boundaries of the last monarchical empire, the Qing, plus any other territory that might have some historical link. The Russians worry about infiltration of Chinese immigrants into Siberia and the Russian Far East, while Mongolia sees the sinification of Inner Mongolia as a portent for their own nation-state. The presence of millions of Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia has been regarded by those states as a potential security question, even though ethnic Chinese have been living there for generations, and many have assimilated into the dominant

valley heartland, and swept them off the mainland. The remnants regrouped on Taiwan, an island which had been Japanese booty after the first Sino-Japan war (1894-95) until 1945. The Guomindang remained the only legal party until 1991, when pluralist democracy was established. Rapid economic growth occurred under free market capitalism, and per capita income on the island is one of the highest in Asia. The U.S. defence umbrella and special relationship have been important factors in the development of Taiwan's economy and democracy.

VI. CONCLUSION

The creation and expansion of the American empire in the Pacific basin has been both accidental and purposeful. In 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner, in "The Significance of the Frontier in American History", wrote that the frontier was gone, and an era of American history was over. In a space of five years a new era began, with America projecting its industrial and military power on a global scale upon acquiring Asian territory from Spain. It broke out of the hemispheric limits of the Monroe Doctrine and set in motion confrontations with the Japanese and German empires that culminated in the victories of 1945. A Soviet empire emerged out of the ruins of war, incorporating Eastern Europe, adding allies in China and North Korea, and threatening a global war. The U.S. had retreated to isolationism after World War I, watching the impotent League of Nations fail to stop German, Italian, and Japanese aggressions.

To the extent that there was a post-World War II American empire in the Western Pacific, its roots were in the 1898 Spanish American War. Add another layer of Wilsonian evangelical democracy reinforced by Christian missionary zeal to convert the

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culture.

Chinese heathen, along with visions of a vast commercial market for U.S. manufactures, and we can better understand its origins. In 1945, the U.S. seemed prepared to resume its less active role in the Pacific region, but the challenge of Soviet empire could not be ignored, and decades of involvement, and intervention followed. Today, the American empire faces a number of crises in the region, and withdrawal from any of them could lead to negative consequences. The American empire evolved in response to other hegemonic empires, and today is the last one standing – partly by luck, but also through a combination of idealism, pragmatism, and ability to learn from its mistakes. Its hegemony is tempered by pluralism and recognition of the awesome and ruinously expensive responsibility of managing global economy and security. The experiences of the East Asian provide lessons for the American empire in the costs, the opportunities and the limitations for remaking a region according to its own image.

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