

**Patterns of Empire**

*The British and American Empires,  
1688 to the Present*

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Week 14

these were the preferred methods of the British state until the late nineteenth century. "London resorted to one expedient after another to evade the need of formal expansion."<sup>160</sup> The British state, in short, "followed the principle of extending control informally if possible and formally [only] if necessary."<sup>161</sup> In this sense, America's informal empire was but a new variant of an older theme. As Wm. Roger Louis notes: "Robinson and Gallagher's Victorians would have recognized the methods of post World War II Americans."<sup>162</sup>

Yet the similarity does not stop here. Even the respective historiographies of British and American empires are similar. In American historiography, a certain sequence unfolded from traditional exceptionalism to revisionism. Traditional exceptionalism asserted that the United States was not an empire during the mid-twentieth century because it did not seize new colonies. Then Williams's revisionism and his Wisconsin School emerged to declare that the United States *was* an empire, but of an informal sort. Studies of the British empire follow the exact same trajectory. As noted, orthodox histories at first denied that Britain was imperial in the mid-nineteenth century. Then, beginning with Robinson and Gallagher's seminal work, historians reconsidered British activities to say that Britain was indeed an empire in the mid-nineteenth century, however of an informal sort. Even American historiography on empire is not so exceptional.<sup>163</sup>

<sup>160</sup> Robinson and Gallagher (1953), p. 12.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>162</sup> See especially Howe (2003) for this extended point.

<sup>163</sup> Other parallels in historiography are astutely discussed in MacDonald (2009).

## Imperial Forms, Global Fields

Colonialism is successful where the subject people are unsophisticated and acquiescent, as in the case of certain South Pacific islanders. Once the dependent people, even if a small minority of them, acquire a degree of worldly wisdom and personal ambition, complications set in. Discontent, resistance, and political psychoses develop.

-- U.S. National Security Council 51 (1949)<sup>1</sup>

Colonialism is in its twilight hour.

-- Erasmus Kloman (1958)<sup>2</sup>

In what ways has the U.S. imperial formation differed from Britain's? It is not the lack of overseas colonies. Nor is it that the U.S. colonial empire was more benign or liberal, that the U.S. empire was uniquely informal, or that its citizens refused to speak the empire's name. Rather, one important difference remains. Whereas both the U.S. and British imperial formations involved colonies, and whereas both entailed informal modalities of power -- cultivating clients, cajoling enemies, and deploying military force -- only the British empire *mixed* informal and formal tactics during its period of hegemony. In the mid-nineteenth century, the British crafted allies, invaded countries, and employed various other informal tactics while also seizing overseas territory as colonial dependencies. The British state did not seize as many colonies during its period of hegemony as it did during its period of hegemonic ascent (a point to be considered later). Yet it did seize some. Alternatively, during its comparable phase of hegemony, the U.S. empire did not seize multiple new colonies. In 1947, it annexed the former Japanese mandates, but afterward the American state relied exclusively on informal imperialism. Whereas the British empire

<sup>1</sup> NSC 51, US policy towards Southeast Asia, July 1, 1949, Declassified Documents Reference Service at [www.dhrs.psmedia.com](http://www.dhrs.psmedia.com) (accessed August 3, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Kloman (1958), p. 361.

was formal and informal at once after 1815, the United States empire shifted from formal to informal after 1947.

This is a significant difference indeed. Perhaps it is what gives credence to exceptionalist claims about American uniqueness. So what accounts for it? Why did the United States turn away from colonialism as a preferred mode of imperialism during its period of hegemony, whereas Britain mixed and mingled the modes? Existing works that have discussed America's informal *imperium* from the mid-twentieth century onward have not yet offered full explanations. The only ones on offer reinscribe exceptionalist themes. In these explanations, the United States resorted to more informal modes of exercising power because of its own national character and institutions. Firmly rooted in "democratic and anti-imperial features," as one historian of the postwar period puts it, the United States restrained from practicing colonialism and could only employ informal tactics that, although still imperialistic, nonetheless respected the integrity of national sovereignty. "The United States, in part because of its democratic structure, pursued policies of 'guns and butter.'" It "mobilized Americans for war but not for permanent foreign occupations."<sup>3</sup> Historian and former White House official Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. likewise suggests that the United States turned to informal imperialism rather than colonial rule because there has been "no sustained demand for empire" in the United States. The minor "spasm" of imperial enthusiasm at the turn of the twentieth century aside, the empire has faced "consistent indifference and resistance" from its democratically minded citizens. Accordingly, informal imperialism, which is "marginal to the subject of direct control," has been the preferred option.<sup>4</sup>

As an explanation, however, this account runs into trouble. Something of the trouble can be seen if we consider an event in the 1950s: Senator John Kennedy's speech on Algeria and the responses to it. This is fitting because Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., who offered an exceptionalist explanation for America's informal imperialism, later served under Kennedy. In 1957, Kennedy gave a speech supporting Algerian independence from France. He referred to "imperialism" as "the enemy of freedom" and decried America's "retreat from the principles of independence and anticolonialism" by not supporting the Algerian revolutionaries. According to exceptionalist thought, this should not be unusual: It is just another manifestation of America's anticolonial values. Yet Kennedy's speech was hardly without controversy. While colleagues and some sectors of the public supported him in his stance (African American civil rights leaders were among them), his speech also drew criticism: After it was publicized, his office received hundreds of letters from citizens across the country attacking him for his anticolonial stance, for "butting in with France's affairs,"

<sup>3</sup> Suri (2009), p. 531.

<sup>4</sup> Schlesinger (2003), p. 45.

and for "lacking a great deal of basic information" on French colonialism.<sup>5</sup> In fact, these latter views were much closer to America's official stance on Algeria: In 1956, the previous year, the United States refused to support a United Nations declaration in support of Algerian independence.

The different responses to Kennedy's speech manifest a complexity that belies the exceptionalist account for American imperial practices. Exceptionalism's explanation for America's turn away from colonialism after the Second World War posits a monolithic anticolonial political culture at home that directly dictated U.S. foreign policy. The divergent responses to Kennedy's stance on Algeria betray any such notion. Nor is this unique. In previous chapters, we have seen other examples of this ambiguity. Immediately after the Second World War, politicians scrambled to take the former Japanese territories, making no attempt to hide their designs, and sectors of the American public supported them. Gallup polls taken in 1944 showed that the majority of Americans wanted their government to take not only the former colonies of Japan but also those of Britain.<sup>6</sup> Seventy percent, in fact, responded affirmatively to a question asked by pollsters: "After the war should the United States keep all of the Japanese islands which we conquer between Hawaii and the Philippines?"<sup>7</sup> Of course, wartime enthusiasm may have pushed these procolonial sentiments beyond normalcy, but the point is that the exceptionalists' tacit assumption that the American public or politicians have been uniformly anticolonial, such that American foreign policy simply reflects these anticolonial values, simply does not hold.

The real issue, as we will see in this chapter, is not just that the exceptionalist explanation posits a uniform and static political culture that shapes policy. It is that the exceptionalist explanation focuses narrowly on domestic or national factors. It highlights events, processes, structures *within* the imperial metropole. This is a classic metropolitan-centered account. It explains imperial actions abroad by ideas, actors, beliefs, or institutions at home. A different approach would widen the lens. It would look beyond domestic political cultures, institutions, electorates, or "national character" and toward *global* structures. It would think harder about the wider international or global context in which the American state had to operate and compare it with the global context in which the British state operated in the nineteenth century. In brief, rather than pointing to metropolitan characteristics to explain imperial policies, it would take seriously the very global structures and relations or *global fields* in which empires had to maneuver.<sup>8</sup> This is the approach taken in this chapter.

<sup>5</sup> See Romahn (2009); quotes from p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Gilchrist (1944), p. 642.

<sup>7</sup> Gallup poll #317, question 16, Field Date 4/25/1944 (<http://brain-gallup.com>; accessed October 26, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> I develop the notion "global fields," which is taken from the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, in Go (2008b).



## Outsourcing Empire

What was different about the global fields in which the United States and Britain operated during their respective periods of hegemonic maturity? One difference lies in political ecology. Scholarship on the expansion of the international system suggests that the political ecology of the nineteenth-century global system can be divided into three basic political units: (1) recognized sovereign nation-states, (2) colonial dependencies of sovereigns, and (3) unrecognized territories and polities that have not been incorporated into the Western-based state system. The first category was European-based and contained the seeds for the modern nation-state: it included those powerful states emerging from the West-phalia system to constitute members of "international society." They engage in formal treaties with each other and see each other as equal sovereigns.<sup>9</sup> The other two categories consisted of non-Western polities without sovereignty. Dependencies or colonies are "entities that sovereigns claim to possess or control."<sup>10</sup> Those polities known as "unrecognized" constitute the frontier of the sovereign system: they are neither formally subordinated to metropolitan states as dependencies, but neither are they recognized as sovereign by the existing sovereign states. Of course, for the Africans, Pacific Islanders, or Asians who lived in these societies, their polities were perfectly recognizable and legitimate. But "unrecognized" here refers to the perception of the Western sovereign states. Polities known as "unrecognized" were "considered by Western states to be outside Western state society."<sup>11</sup>

Following this scheme, there were important differences between the British and U.S. periods of hegemony (see Table 4.1). One key difference is that in the first half of the nineteenth century most of the world (65 percent of the earth's land surface) consisted of unrecognized territories. Sovereign states, centered in Europe, took up only about 24 percent of the earth's land surface, and their colonial dependencies took up 11 percent. Even in 1878, just before the great imperial scramble, 32 percent of the world's land surface was unrecognized, mostly in Africa. Imperialism at the turn of the century then turned all of Africa into dependent territory. Therefore, by the time the United States reached hegemony in the mid-twentieth century, the field was radically different from when the British ruled. In 1946, only 16 percent of the world's land surface was unrecognized; the rest was occupied by European empires. The United States entered a global field wherein most of the world had already been colonized.

This is a simple but important difference. As studies of imperialism show, sovereign states tend to seize only unrecognized territories.<sup>12</sup> They are less likely to colonize either other sovereign states or even colonial dependencies of other sovereigns (except as "spoils of war"). This makes sense: Colonizing

<sup>9</sup> Bull and Watson (1984), Krasner (1988), Watson (1992): 202-13.

<sup>10</sup> Strang (1991): 149.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 151; Watson (1992), pp. 214-27.

<sup>12</sup> Strang (1991).

TABLE 4.1. Comparative Political Ecology: Proportion of World's Land Surface Occupied by Recognized Polities and Unrecognized

Hegemonic Cycle	Year	Percent World's Land Surface Occupied by:		
		Recognized Sovereign States	Recognized Colonies	Unrecognized Areas
UK	1816	24	11	65
	1878	54	14	32
	1914	53	31	16
US	1946	71	18	11
	1960	92	8	0
	1973	97	3	0

Sources: Data calculated from information in Goertz and Diehl's (1992) territorial changes dataset; the Correlates of War Project (2005) on state system membership; for colonial holdings and areas, Clark (1936); Henige (1970); *Statesman's Yearbook* (1864-); Banks (1976).

the territory of another sovereign state is an arduous task, a zero-sum game that would have to be resolved through outright purchase or war between sovereigns. However, unrecognized territories do not involve these complications. They appear as frontier areas ready for the taking, with comparably little worry about rival claims. It follows that the more unrecognized territory there is in the world, the more opportunities there are for colonization. This is why, as the historian Dominic Lieven points out, European empires could more easily expand outside Europe than within it. Whereas annexing recognized territories in Europe brought all kinds of jealousies, rivalries, and tensions, territorial aggrandizement outside of Europe – into "unrecognized" territory – was far easier.<sup>13</sup>

We might already see how these different field configurations impacted British and American imperial forms. Most obviously, the fact that there was less unrecognized territory in the mid-twentieth century served as a constraint on American colonization, whereas the fact that there was so much more in the previous century means that there were *more* opportunities for the British state to colonize. To be sure, the vast majority of the colonies Britain acquired from 1816 to the early 1870s had neither been sovereign states nor dependencies of another sovereign. They were unrecognized territories. Yet because the United States entered a field dominated by sovereign states (e.g. in Latin America) and vast territorial empires that took up most of the globe, it had fewer opportunities to colonize than Britain had. There was much less land to grab and fewer foreign peoples available to rule. For this reason alone – regardless of whatever anticolonial "values" or "national character" the United States might

<sup>13</sup> Lieven (2002), p. 46.

have had – the American state was simply less likely to institute a new round of colonialism in the mid-twentieth century.

This is only one part of the story, however. The United States emerged victorious from World War II, which proved its superior military strength, and European powers were becoming weak and dependent upon U.S. economic aid. In this situation, the United States might have taken European colonies by showing its new muscles. It might have taken colonies without too much fear of reprisal from its weak counterparts. So why not? Here arises the other critical difference between the global fields of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Given that so much of the world in the twentieth century was already subjected to the direct control of European imperial powers, the United States did not need to seize new colonies. It could just enlist preexisting European imperial networks to realize its goals, outsourcing territorial control to its European allies rather than seizing its own colonial territory.

Consider first the American state's imperial imperatives in the postwar period. One was expanded trade. Exceptionalist narratives and revisionist historians alike point out that the United States inaugurated a global free trade regime. For exceptionalists, this reveals how the American state was not imperial. For revisionists it shows that it invented new imperial tactics. Yet both sides run the risk of simplifying the complex activities of the United States in the immediate aftermath of World War II and through the early 1960s. On the one hand, in this period some politicians, sectors of the business community, and policy makers spoke valiantly of free trade. Worried about the 1930s exclusivism that had purportedly contributed to war, and concerned that wartime levels of growth would not be sustained in peace, they looked abroad for new markets and raw materials.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, this was not intrinsically an anticolonial or anti-imperial stance. To the contrary, as the business sector and policy makers repeatedly stressed, the best way for the United States to get new markets and materials was not by dismantling the existing imperial systems, but rather by sustaining them and tapping into them directly. The colonial world was critical for supplying the ever-increasing demand for various raw materials.<sup>15</sup> Analysts noted in 1941 that the "United States is the greatest ultimate consumer of colonial products."<sup>16</sup> In 1950, the State Department produced memos stressing how important Africa was for providing raw materials and, in general, as a site for American "trade, investment, and transportation interests."<sup>17</sup> Various investigative commissions under the Truman administration demonstrated how important minerals, metals, tin, rubber, and other strategic materials were coming from colonies.<sup>18</sup> In 1952, another

<sup>14</sup> Darby (1987), pp. 194–207.

<sup>15</sup> Kolko (1988), pp. 54–55.

<sup>16</sup> Holcombe (1941), p. 76.

<sup>17</sup> FRUS 1950, p. 1527.

<sup>18</sup> Darby (1987), p. 205.

analysis stressed, "existing and potential production in colonial territories are vital to meeting these needs of Western industrial countries."<sup>19</sup>

The conclusion of these and other reports was that, to keep the supply incoming and in hopes of finding markets for American products, the United States should support European colonial structures rather than dismantle them. European rule, stressed a State Department report in 1950, offered "political and economic stability." As long as American capital was afforded "equal treatment," America's "economic goals... should be achieved through coordination and cooperation with the colonial powers."<sup>20</sup> The scholar Rupert Emerson observed in 1947 that "American interest and interests, narrowly interpreted, would be served more adequately by the maintenance of the old-time colonial set-up than by ventures into the uncharted waters of autonomy and independence," not least because the "old-time colonial set up" rather than a world of independent nation-states could better serve to meet America's need for raw materials and markets.<sup>21</sup> The State Department's policy on French rule in Africa followed: "Our primary objective in French West and Equatorial Africa is to keep those territories under friendly and effective administration. To this end we recognize the legitimacy and desirability of French political control."<sup>22</sup> In 1953, Undersecretary of State Byroade publicly announced that U.S. policy had been and would continue to be oriented toward maintaining European empires. He added how support of the European empires was tied to America's strategic interest in keeping Europe strong: "[T]he granting of complete freedom to those who were not yet ready for it would serve the best interests neither of the US nor the free world as a whole... Let us be frank in recognizing our stake in the strength and stability of certain European nations which exercise influence in the dependent areas. They are our allies. A sudden break in economic relations might seriously injure the European economy upon which our Atlantic defence system depends, and at the same time prove equally injurious to the dependent territories themselves."<sup>23</sup>

These were not idle words. By the time Byroade had made his speech, the American state had already put its strategy of supporting the European empires into action. It pushed the European empires to open their doors to North American interests and in exchange offered financial aid and support that would help keep those empires intact. Such aid was sorely needed due to the devastation of the war. Without funds, Europe's empires would collapse. The American state decided to provide them.<sup>24</sup> The Marshall Plan was a part of this strategy. It was the economic aid package aimed at helping Europe recover from the

<sup>19</sup> Bell (1952), p. 97.

<sup>20</sup> FRUS 1950, V, p. 1527.

<sup>21</sup> Emerson (1947), p. 270.

<sup>22</sup> FRUS 1950, V, 1528.

<sup>23</sup> *Times*, 18 November 1953, p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> FRUS 1950, V, p. 1527, 1535; Louis and Robinson (1994).



devastation of the war, but it was not only aimed at Europe. Administered through the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA), it was also directed at Europe's colonial empires. In fact, a large chunk of the ECA's work went to supporting Europe's colonies. Estimates by officials within the ECA reveal that approximately \$7.5 billion were targeted for Europe's colonial empires in the early 1950s, with the French and British colonial empires receiving approximately \$6.5 billion, and the Portuguese, Belgian, and Dutch empires receiving the rest.<sup>25</sup> In this way, Europe's economies could be restored not in spite of colonialism but through it. John Orchard, chairman of the ECA Advisory Committee on Underdeveloped Areas, explained that the program would help to reduce the "dollar gap" while also providing Europe with "increased supplies of essential commodities" and "wider markets for European factories." At the same time, the United States would benefit. The United States would gain access to the colonies, which would "supply additional raw materials for our factories and foodstuffs to supplement our agricultural production" and provide markets in the colonial world. It would further increase Europe's own purchasing power, enabling an economic recovery that would be open to new products from across the Atlantic.<sup>26</sup> For these reasons and others, the State Department conceded in 1950: "[T]he colonial relationship [between Europe and its dependencies] . . . is still in many places useful and necessary."<sup>27</sup>

Postwar economics was only one dimension of the outsourced American empire. The other was security and defense, a matter that was increasingly foregrounded after 1947 as the Cold War intensified. One goal was to use allied European empires as defensive bulwarks against Russia. As a State Department memo in 1952 explained, the United States must "rely upon the colonial powers of Western Europe to make an addition to American strength sufficient to deter and to hold in check the tremendous military power of the Soviet armies."<sup>28</sup> The United States therefore gave aid to the French military in Indochina and the Dutch in Indonesia.<sup>29</sup> Supporting the French military effort in Indochina (through aid that amounted to 80 percent of the French military costs by the 1950s) was aimed at stopping Vietnamese Communists from taking over the country and strengthening Britain's position in Malaysia against the spread of Communism.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, to the mid-1950s, the United States relied on the long-established British presence in key areas such as the Middle East as a bulwark against Soviet expansion.<sup>31</sup> To stop dominions from falling, the American state simply propped the European empires up against them. George Kennan of

<sup>25</sup> Orchard (1951), pp. 71-2.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>27</sup> FRUS 1950, V, p. 1527.

<sup>28</sup> FRUS 1952-4, III, p. 1105.

<sup>29</sup> In 1950, the Truman administration allocated \$10 million in military aid for the French-sponsored governments of Indochina and approved a program of assistance to them. See Rotter (1984), p. 333.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> FRUS 1947, V, pp. 495, 524; Kolko (1988), p. 20.

the State Department's Policy-Planning Staff later declared: "The dissolution of the [British] empire was not in our interest as there were many things the Commonwealth could do which we could not do and which we wished them to continue doing."<sup>32</sup> Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. told fellow Senators, "we need . . . these countries to be strong, and they cannot be strong without their colonies."<sup>33</sup>

Supporting Europe's empires was also important for America's own military-base system. Prior to World War II, the United States had only a small network of military bases, with bases only in its own colonies (e.g., the Philippines, Hawaii, Puerto Rico).<sup>34</sup> By the end of the war, however, military strategists had planned for an extensive worldwide network of security. The war had already brought American forces to the far ends of the earth; how to keep them there? Military advisors and policy planners in the executive branch landed on an easy answer: Use the territorial domains already established by European colonialism.

The strategy partly originated in 1941 when the United States lent Britain war supplies in exchange for ninety-nine-year leases establishing military bases in the Britain's Caribbean colonies. After the war, the process continued, especially as the containment strategy emerged in the late 1940s. The United States gave loans to Britain so that Britain could reestablish its overseas empire after the war; in exchange, the United States was granted the use of any and all of Britain's overseas colonies for military bases or transport.<sup>35</sup> The United States made similar arrangements with the French in North Africa. French colonial control provided "stability, even though such stability is obtained largely through repression" (in the words of the Bureau of Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs in the State Department).<sup>36</sup> This stability was deemed important for halting future Soviet aggression and for allowing the American state to maintain a military presence in the region. An agreement with France in 1950, for instance, enabled the United States to construct five new air bases in Morocco for Strategic Air Command.<sup>37</sup> Even though "imperial of the old school is practiced" in North Africa, concluded the State Department, "there is one favorable factor, that of US strategic interests, since we are in a position to use this area in time of war."<sup>38</sup> Similarly, the United States was allowed to set up an air base in the Azores by Portugal, but only if it supported Portugal's bid to reassert itself over Timor (that airbase, at Lajes, would later stand as the vital ground for U.S. airlift missions to Israel during the Yom Kippur War of 1973).

In the end, the United States was able to create its vast network of global military power by relying on rather than dismantling European colonialism.

<sup>32</sup> Louis and Robinson (1994), p. 499, fn. 42.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 468.

<sup>34</sup> Harkavy (1982): 66-7, 100.

<sup>35</sup> Louis and Robinson (1994); Harkavy (1982), pp. 127-53; Sandars (2000), pp. 42-61.

<sup>36</sup> FRUS 1950, V, p. 1528.

<sup>37</sup> Harkavy (1982), p. 50. See also Kolko 1988: 19; FRUS 1950: V, p. 1573.

<sup>38</sup> FRUS 1950, V, p. 1573.

Out of the top thirty-nine territories in Central America, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific wherein the United States maintained troops from 1950 to 1960 (measured in terms of number of troops), eight were U.S. colonies (excluding Japan, which the United States temporarily ruled after World War II), and twenty were colonies or protectorates of European countries (Table 4.2). Therefore, close to 70 percent of America's troop outposts in the peripheral world were in colonies.<sup>39</sup> A secret memo in the State Department in 1950 stated: "[T]he security interests of the US at the present time will best be served by a policy of support for the Western Colonial Powers."<sup>40</sup>

We now have one part of an answer for why the United States did not take new territories in the mid-twentieth century: It did not need to. Because it entered a global field that was already populated by empires with which it could ally, all the American state had to do in order to meet its postwar economic and security goals was support those empires and outsource imperial functions to them. This was a not a privilege afforded the British empire a century earlier. For one thing, the British empire could not easily outsource imperial tasks to other empires. It did enlist the support of other empires when and where it was possible. It supported the Ottoman empire to block Russian expansion, maintain control over Mediterranean trade, and prevent an overland route to India from falling into enemy hands.<sup>41</sup> However, this approach could only go so far. Whereas the United States faced a situation wherein its allies controlled most of the world's colonies, the British state faced a world in which most of the major colonial empires were foes rather than friends. Russia or France could sometimes be enlisted for support; but they were just as often enemies.

It is also important that so much more of the world was uncolonized in the nineteenth century. This meant that the British state could not meet its economic goals without imperial expansion in the colonial mode. Like Americans in the mid-twentieth century, British statesmen and capitalists in the nineteenth century consistently looked for access to new raw materials and markets. Whereas the Americans could meet this goal by relying on the sociopolitical and economic structures created and sustained by European colonialism, the British could not. Because so much of the world was uncolonized, there were no such preexisting structures upon which to depend. To extract materials and find new markets, the British state had to create those sociopolitical and economic structures by itself, which meant the direct seizure and colonial control of territory. Sir Charles Dilke reflected on British expansion in the mid-nineteenth

<sup>39</sup> This counts countries that later received independence but were colonies when the United States first established troop bases.

<sup>40</sup> FRUS 1950-3, III, pp. 1078-9; see also FRUS 1952-4, III, p. 1081; Fraser (1992), p. 115.

<sup>41</sup> Lynn (1999), p. 111. The Convention of Balta Lima in 1858 was directed at this goal. See Owen (1992), pp. 10-11 and Kasaba (1992), pp. 73-4. Later, in 1855, Britain backed a private loan to help the Ottomans fight Russia during the Crimean War and sent a consulate, military advisors, and missions to facilitate the improvement of Turkey's administrative structure and military. See Rodkey (1930), pp. 222-4.

TABLE 4.2. U.S. Troop Stations, 1950-1960: Top Thirty-Nine Non-Western Countries

Country	Total No. of Troops	Dependency Status of Country <sup>a</sup>
Japan	1,687,509	Independent
Republic of Korea	1,573,585	Independent
Hawaiian Islands	456,264	US
Alaska	442,863	US
Philippines	153,324	US
Guam	152,246	US
Puerto Rico	142,486	US
Morocco	110,811	France
Taiwan	52,144	China
Libya	47,168	UK-France
Turkey	46,700	Independent
Bermuda	36,393	UK
Marshall Islands	25,963	US
Lebanon	18,105	Independent
Saudi Arabia	12,848	Independent
Midway	12,408	US
Hong Kong	11,343	UK
Vietnam	9,311	France
Eritrea	8,724	UK
Algeria	7,043	France
West Indies Federation	6,432	UK
Bahamas	5,404	UK
Malta	5,122	UK
Iran	4,271	Independent
Haiti	4,031	Independent
Johnston Island	3,749	US
Volcano Islands	3,562	US
Thailand	2,720	Independent
Bahrain	2,341	UK
Pakistan	2,276	UK
Trinidad	1,396	UK
Australia	1,374	UK
New Zealand	1,082	UK
Jamaica	1,016	UK
Malaysia	953	UK
Egypt	828	UK
Antigua	638	UK
Ecuador	525	Independent
India	499	Independent (1950)

<sup>a</sup> Refers to status at time of U.S. basing agreement or initial station; includes colonies, protectorates, or (for US) "outlying territories."

Sources: Dependency status, *Statesman's Yearbook*; Troops, U.S. Department of Defense, Statistical Information Analysis Division, "Military Personnel Historical Reports" (<http://www.dior.whs.mil/mmhd/military/history/309hist.htm>). Accessed January 2006.



century by saying that "large markets" and raw materials had to be found in "almost all those territories in the globe which did not belong to the European race."<sup>42</sup> In other words, the British state tried to meet its imperial imperatives by entering previously untapped regions — areas untouched and uncontrolled by European empires. Exploiting these untapped regions of the world meant annexing and then controlling them directly to make them manageable.

To be sure, for the British state, the conditions for economic extraction, production, and trade would have been more difficult to secure without colonial control. Colonialism was necessary for seizing land, protecting settlers and planters, and articulating local labor systems to export production. It was also necessary for maintaining security and order when these prerequisites could not be secured by other means.<sup>43</sup> Thus many annexations began as enterprising merchants, landowners, and vanguard settlers pressed the home government to annex the territory in order to create stable conditions and provide protection in the frontier. Accordingly, much of the territorial expansion from the mid-century onward occurred on the frontiers of already existing colonies, such as around India, in Canada, or in Australia.<sup>44</sup> In other cases, annexation was necessary to consolidate trade networks and expand them. Contiguous areas around Bombay, in and near Australia, and in Malaya became increasingly important to British trade by the late century, and fittingly Britain then swallowed them up (e.g., outlying parts of India in 1815 and 1818; Western Australia in 1832; New Zealand in 1841; and the Malaya/Straits Settlements in 1867).<sup>45</sup> The scramble for Africa later in the century followed the same logic: Colonial control was necessary to secure the conditions for effective access and trade.<sup>46</sup> As Joseph Chamberlain remarked in 1896, "We, in our colonial policy, as fast as we acquire new territory and develop it, develop it . . . for the commerce of the world."<sup>47</sup> Relatedly, Hong Kong and Singapore were taken because they could serve as trading ports and naval posts necessary for Britain's attempt to open up China to trade. Similarly, the Falkland Islands were seized to consolidate Britain's trade with Latin America.

These seizures were also related to the other imperial imperative: security and defense. For much of the period after 1815, the British state pursued a "blue water policy," focusing much of its energy on home defense and keeping an eye out on continental powers. At the same time, however, Britain's military was moving around the globe, both to help its expanding trade and to keep rival European empires in check. In 1820, there were six overseas commands: the Mediterranean, the southeast coast of America, North America and the West Indies, the Cape of Good Hope, the west coast of Africa, and the East Indies. As the decades proceeded, increasingly more command stations were set up, not least in Australia and the Pacific, proportionate to the increase in duties

and activities that the navy faced.<sup>48</sup> Unlike the United States, Britain could not rely on other empires for military access to these sites. The British state had to take the territory itself to maintain safe basing stations. A handful of exceptions aside, the British basing system was set up within Britain's empire, not outside it or in other empires.<sup>49</sup> Is it any wonder that whereas "the British Empire took some two hundred years to reach its peak, the global security system of the US [took] a mere ten years"?<sup>50</sup> The British had to annex frontier territory around the world to establish its military bases, making for a slow and piecemeal process of expansion.<sup>51</sup> The United States, by contrast, could rely on the colonial domains already constructed by its predecessors to realize its military dominance, thereby taking a much shorter span of time. If America's aversion to colonization after World War II was at all a virtue, it was a virtue afforded by a luxury: the luxury of being a relative latecomer to empire.

### The Subaltern Speaks Back

Understanding the political ecologies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries helps us understand why the United States was reluctant to be imperialistic in the territorial mode, whereas the British state was more willing. But this raises more questions. Most important, why didn't the United States colonize after the 1960s? After all, while the United States relied on European empires to realize its imperial goals from 1945 to the 1960s, some colonies had already obtained independence by that time. Latin America had been independent for a long time. Furthermore, by the mid-1960s, the European empires finally crumbled. This meant that the United States could no longer rely on them, and a host of new countries became independent. The United States could have initiated an entirely new round of territorial imperialism. But it did not. Instead it deployed informal tactics, thus surmounting the territorial constraints of nineteenth-century imperialism.

Why? When the European empires finally broke down, why didn't the American state step in directly to replace them? Addressing this question brings us to the other dimension of the global field that we must consider: not political ecology, but political culture; and not the political culture of the imperial metropolises, but that of the colonized and postcolonized — the very people imperialism sought to direct and manage.

### "The Age of Imperialism is Ended"

On Memorial Day, 1942, Sumner Welles gave a renowned address at the Arlington National Amphitheater. Welles was the U.S. Undersecretary of State and one of President Roosevelt's main foreign policy advisors. A year earlier, he had appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine. Given his position, and given

<sup>42</sup> Dilke (1890), p. 462.

<sup>43</sup> Platt (1968a), p. 153.

<sup>44</sup> Darwin (1997), p. 630.

<sup>45</sup> Cain (1999), p. 34; Tomlinson (1999), pp. 60–1.

<sup>46</sup> Hynes (1976).

<sup>47</sup> Platt (1968a): 365.

<sup>48</sup> Beeler (1997), p. 26.

<sup>49</sup> See the informative list of overseas stations in *ibid.*, pp. 28–9.

<sup>50</sup> Sanders (2000), p. 6.

<sup>51</sup> Harkavy (1982): 46–50; Hyam (1999): 31.



America's entry into the war, British diplomats and others around the world took notice of his address – as it turns out, rightfully so. His speech did nothing short of calling for the end of empires. “If this war is in fact a war for the liberation of peoples,” Welles declared, “it must assure the sovereign equality of peoples throughout the world, as well as in the world of the Americas. Our victory must bring in its train the liberation of all peoples. Discrimination between peoples because of their race, creed or color must be abolished. The age of imperialism is ended.”<sup>52</sup>

Welles's address is notable because it appears to express a classic exceptionalist theme. Presumably, Welles, President Roosevelt, Cordell Hull, and the rest of U.S. officialdom planned to see a new world order emerge from the ashes of World War II. Operating from America's long-standing anticolonial and democratic tradition, they hoped to inaugurate a more liberal world that transcended the tyrannical tendencies of Old World imperialism. This was to be a world of independent nation-states rather than empires. Had not Welles played an important part in establishing the United Nations? In this light, Welles's speech would appear both reflective and prescient: the former because the speech manifested America's traditions of liberty and freedom and anticolonial values; the latter because, in the post-World War II period, the old empires were eventually abolished, with the United Nations – and the benevolent American hegemon – rising from their ashes.

We might already see the problems. For one, interpreting Welles's speech as prescient would occlude America's own imperialism. It would blind us to the fact that the United States took Japanese territories after the war as colonial possessions; or that the United States, as just seen, restored and propped up the European empires after World War II rather than dismantling them. For another, interpreting Welles's speech as reflective of American values would overlook the fact that, although Welles himself made grand anti-imperial pronouncements, he often reiterated age-old colonial maxims about colonized peoples' lack of capacity and their need for continued imperial control. A year after his Memorial Day address, he conjured that discourse to justify continued imperial intervention: “We all of us recognize that it will take many generations for some backward peoples to be prepared for autonomy and self-government.”<sup>53</sup> In fact, Welles's grandiose speech – declaring that the “age of imperialism is ended” and asserting that the war should be fought for the “liberation” of all peoples – was pragmatically motivated. Penned in 1942, Welles had specific things in mind. Along with America's allies, he hoped to enlist colonized peoples in the fight against Germany. He pretended to be the champion of the anti-imperial cause in order to win nationalists in the colonial world over to the Allied side.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Louis (1978), pp. 154–5.

<sup>53</sup> *New York Times*, Oct. 17, 1943, p. 32.

<sup>54</sup> See Louis (1978), pp. 154–5.

Welles's speech should not be taken as reflective of anti-imperial American values; nor should it be read as heralding a new world order inaugurated by America's valiant agency. A different reading would see it rather as reflective of a *global* shift, a wider international wave of change that Welles and other officials chased and rode, rather than one they engendered by their own agency. In a later speech, Welles alluded to that global tide more precisely. “New and powerful nationalistic forces are breaking into life throughout the earth, and in particular in the vast regions of Africa, of the Near East, and of the Far East. Must not these forces, unless they are to be permitted to start new and devastating inundations, be canalized through the channels of liberty into the great stream of constructive and cooperative human endeavour?”<sup>55</sup> In other words, Welles's statement, “the age of imperialism is ended,” does not so much reflect deep American values as it reflects transformations occurring in the wider global field. Those transformations made for a very different global field than that faced by Britain in the nineteenth century. I speak of the emergence, proliferation, and ultimate dominance of anticolonial nationalism in the colonized and later postcolonial world.

### Nationalism Redounded

It is by now well known that anticolonial nationalism spread around the globe during the twentieth century. Revolts in the Americas in previous centuries – including the American revolt against Britain, the Haitian rebellion against France, and the Latin American republics against Spain – had established the precedent. However, what was new in the twentieth century was the emergence of anticolonial nationalism across the globe rather than in just one region, and among predominantly nonwhite colonized populations rather than white-settler or Creole populations in the Americas. Traditional histories locate its origins in the espousals of self-determination by President Woodrow Wilson and his Fourteen Points during World War I. Yet in fact, as other scholarship emphasizes, anticolonial nationalism and espousals of self-determination had emerged long before Wilson's speech (which is exactly why his discourse resonated among colonized peoples beyond Wilson's intentions).<sup>56</sup> The fact that European colonialism had taken over nearly all of the peripheral world by this time was itself a factor that helped to propel anticolonial nationalism. European colonialism had offered education and political experience to colonized elites while also generating discontent and redefining local identities into nationalized spatial boundaries.<sup>57</sup>

The earliest stirrings of anticolonial nationalism in the nonwhite world were already seen in the Indian National Congress (1885), the Islamic revival movements in the Middle East (beginning in the late nineteenth century), the Philippine Revolution against Spain (1896), and the Pan-African Congress in 1900.

<sup>55</sup> Welles (1943).

<sup>56</sup> Manela (2006).

<sup>57</sup> Grimal (1978), pp. 36–47; Goswami (1998).

The Japanese victory over Russia (1905) and the Xinhai Revolution in China (1911) added fuel to the fire, signifying to the colonial world that nonwhite peoples could determine their own destinies.<sup>58</sup> Seizing on this global development, V. I. Lenin joined the chorus, articulating anti-imperial rhetoric and calling for self-determination of all peoples.<sup>59</sup> It was Lenin's discourse that compelled Woodrow Wilson to add pronouncements on self-determination in his Fourteen Points. Rather than being the originator of anticolonial nationalism, Wilson was just trying to keep up.<sup>60</sup>

The period between the world wars was a turning point. President Wilson had received pleas for help from anticolonial nationalists around the world but, as he did nothing to help, disappointment spread. Imperial boundaries existing before World War I were reinscribed at the postwar Treaty of Paris, much to the further disappointment of anticolonial nationalists who held out hope that they would be dismantled. During the 1920s, as Gandhi's populism spread through India, his anticolonial stance received widespread attention from the newly educated colonial elites around the imperial world.<sup>61</sup> At the Fifth Pan-American Conference at Santiago, Chile, in 1923, Latin Americans joined the chorus, charging the United States with imperialism for intervening in the Dominican Republic and Haiti.<sup>62</sup> The 1930s Depression then laid the socioeconomic conditions for protests across Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. World War II helped hasten the trend. It weakened colonial structures, armed colonized peoples, and raised questions about the strength of European empires and their future viability.<sup>63</sup> After the war, anticolonial nationalism continued to spread. In 1951, the General Assembly of the United Nations voted for a review of the UN system of territorial administration of mandates and for a statement to be inserted into Covenants that "all peoples shall have the right of self-determination" (the U.S. delegate voted against this).<sup>64</sup> The Bandung Conference in 1955 solidified these anticolonial sentiments while offering a powerful rallying point for an seemingly unstoppable nationalism around the world.<sup>65</sup>

The emergence and proliferation of anticolonialism significantly altered the global landscape, making for a new terrain of action. Foremost, it became a powerful mobilizing device, making possible new coalitions and political formations. As a symbol, anticolonial nationalism and its principle of universal self-determination mobilized disparate groups within and across imperial space. Tribes or religious sectarians could unite on national grounds whereas they

<sup>58</sup> Furedi (1994), pp. 27–8; Grimal (1978), pp. 4–36.

<sup>59</sup> Koebner and Schmidt (1964), pp. 282–4.

<sup>60</sup> Manela (2006), pp. 40–1.

<sup>61</sup> Easton (1964).

<sup>62</sup> Koebner and Schmidt (1964), p. 299.

<sup>63</sup> On the development of anti-colonial nationalism in the early twentieth century through World War II, see Holland (1985), pp. 1–12 and Furedi (1994), pp. 10–27.

<sup>64</sup> Pratt (1958), pp. 141–2.

<sup>65</sup> See for example Parker (2006).

may not have before, and colonized peoples from different countries could find common cause. After Italy attacked Ethiopia in October of 1935, for instance, protests erupted as far away as British Guiana, and activists in Harlem, NY, held mass meetings to enlist soldier volunteers. W. E. B. DuBois declared it to be a "cost in debt and death" for "the whole colored world – India, China and Japan, Africa in Africa and in America, and all the South Seas and Indian South America."<sup>66</sup> This reaction manifests the larger trend. Empires were increasingly seen as illegitimate, nation-states were becoming the ideal, and anticolonial nationalism could now become a tool for mobilization. As the historian Koebner observed in 1964: "The political word [imperialism] . . . had by 1940 become the rallying cry of an opposition outside the English-speaking part of the world."<sup>67</sup> In 1952, the Foreign Office prepared a memorandum on "The Problem of Nationalism" that circulated in Winston Churchill's cabinet. The memo warned of the "dangers inherent in the present upsurge of nationalism" around the imperial world and cautioned against the "intersections" of "Asian nationalism" and nationalism in "the Near East and Africa."<sup>68</sup> Anticolonial nationalism became a global force to reckon.

As anticolonial nationalism diffused across the global field, and as the principle of national self-determination became a potent tool by which to accrue political support, the terrain of geopolitical competition likewise shifted. The USSR, for instance, tried to use it as symbolic capital. This had begun during the First World War with Lenin's anti-imperial rhetoric, prompting Wilson, as mentioned earlier, to declare support for self-determination. But as anticolonialists mobilized further during and after World War II, and as the Cold War heightened between 1947 and 1951, officials in Washington became increasingly worried that the Soviet Union would penetrate anticolonial nationalist movements and use the new powerful discourse for their own ends. A 1950 policy paper from the Bureau of Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs assessed the situation in Africa:

While Communism has made very little headway in most of Africa, European nations and the United States have become alert to the danger of militant Communism penetrating the area. The USSR has sought within the United Nations and outside to play the role of the champion of the colonial peoples of the world. While the greater portion of the areas of Africa have as yet no firm nationalist aspirations, there are certain areas such as French North Africa and British West Africa where the spirit of nationalism is increasing. The USSR has sought to gain the sympathy of nationalist elements.<sup>69</sup>

The diffusion of anticolonial nationalism is also significant because it rounded back to Europe and the United States to impact imperial thought. As colonized groups mobilized against empire, so too did anti-imperialist thought galvanize in Britain. The overwhelming tide of anticolonial nationalism likely

<sup>66</sup> DuBois (1935), p. 87. See also Furedi (1994), p. 23.

<sup>67</sup> Koebner and Schmidt (1964), p. 300.

<sup>68</sup> "The Problem of Nationalism," June 21, 1952, FO 936–217.

<sup>69</sup> FRUS 1950, V, p. 1525.